

2006

Vincentiana Vol. 50, No. 6 [Full Issue]

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Recommended Citation

(2006) "Vincentiana Vol. 50, No. 6 [Full Issue]," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 50 : No. 6 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol50/iss6/1>

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12-31-2006

Volume 50, no. 6: November-December 2006

Congregation of the Mission

Recommended Citation

Congregation of the Mission. *Vincentiana*, 50, no. 6 (November-December 2006)

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VINCENTIANA

50th YEAR - N. 6

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2006



The Vincentian Missionary Vocation

VSLPER.
255.77005
V775
v.50:6
(2006:
Nov.-Dec.)

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

VINCENTIANA

Magazine
of the Congregation of the Mission

50th Year - N. 6
November-December 2006

Editor
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Publication
General Curia
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Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 Rome (Italy)
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Authorization
Tribunal of Rome
5 December 1974 - n. 15706

Responsible
Giuseppe Guerra, C.M.

Printer
Tipolitografia Ugo Detti
Via G. Savonarola, 1
00195 Rome (Italy)
Tel./Fax: 06 39 73 75 32

Subscriptions for 2007
40,00 € - 40 US \$

Vincentiana is published
in English, French and Spanish,
thanks to the collaboration
of a team of translators

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GENERAL CURIA

Rev. Joseph L. Levesgue, C.M.
President of Niagara University
Alumni Hall
Niagara University, New York 14109
USA

Rome, 31 July 2006

Dear Joe,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

It gives me great pleasure to share with you some of my reflections with regard to Niagara University as it celebrates its 150th anniversary during the 2006-2007 academic year. I present my thoughts as an alumnus of Niagara, as well as a former member of the faculty and campus ministry staff, and now as Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission.

First and foremost, this celebration of the 150 years is the opportunity to give thanks to God for all the good that God has done through the presence of Niagara University and for how God has touched the lives of so many young people through the academic and other human services that Niagara University provides for all its members.

Secondly, I would like to say that it is an honor and a joy to be a part of what Niagara University is all about. I am happy to see that there continues to be dynamic life within the university, noting that the full-time undergrad population, as well as the full- and part-time undergrad enrollment have increased steadily since 2000 and that the grad school, full- and part-time, has also increased tremendously, by 55%. There must be a number of different factors, accounting for this increase in enrollment, that continue to make Niagara University attractive to students. I know what it is that

makes Niagara attractive to me and that is what I would like to share with you at this time.

1. Niagara University, as an academic institution, desires to give a holistic preparation to young people, both in the Catholic and the Vincentian tradition.
2. It is a university that goes beyond the borders of the United States. I think the good relationship that exists between Niagara University and many of the citizens of Canada, who have benefited from the university's programs and education, has always been considered a very positive sign. That is just one of many examples where people from other countries have come and made Niagara University their place of study.
3. Another attractive aspect of the university is its nationally recognized service-learning program. What a wonderful commentary it is that Niagara University students annually contribute nearly 50,000 hours of vital service to the local community.
4. The relationship that the university has with the local community, that is, the Niagara Falls' area, has always been special. More than ever, I think that the university is called to play a significant role in supporting the development of Niagara Falls.

We, as a Congregation, have recognized the importance of the university in the role it plays in its relationship with the local community of Niagara Falls. For this reason, we awarded you our Systemic Change Award for the project that you developed to benefit the local community. You contend that leaders in the faith community know how to effectively serve the poor. For this reason, you conceived a project whose overarching goal is to develop a model of public ministry in the spirit of St. Vincent that addresses urgent community needs by empowering individuals to think and act creatively to help themselves and their communities. Its specific goals are: 1) to build the capacity of the faith-based institutions serving the disenfranchised and poor areas in the city of Niagara Falls; 2) to provide training and development opportunities for members of the local faith community; and 3) to provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of issues and topics critical to serving the urban poor in our community.

Poverty has been evident in the city of Niagara Falls at least since my time as a student. This situation has only worsened in the past 30 years. So the challenge remains for Niagara University, through its administration, staff and students, to act

in solidarity with those who suffer from poverty and are marginalized in the city. As a Vincentian institution, Niagara is in the right place at the right time. The city calls you to give your best to put into practice what is learned in the academic environment of Niagara University. It is our heritage as Vincentians, both priests, brothers and laity, to show our deep concern for the rights and dignity of the human person, especially the poor, the suffering, the handicapped, and the outcast. That deep concern, if it is to be authentic, has to begin at home.

5. While acting locally, the university also challenges all its members to think globally. I have always noted that faculty, staff and students are dedicated to building a better world community. Our Founder, St. Vincent de Paul, invites us to make love infinitely creative. My prayer is that Niagara University, as it celebrates its 150th anniversary, will continue to show creativity in the way it lives out its mission of love and to instill in all its members — faculty, staff and students — a passion for learning and, even beyond that, a passion for life.
6. One of the things that makes Niagara University special is, in a sense, its smallness. This offers the opportunity for more personal relationships, enabling students to develop their human potential and to give the best of themselves to better their own life situations, while also learning that the best way to improve their life situation is by giving themselves to others. In continuing our Vincentian tradition, I know that Niagara seeks to inspire its students to serve all members of society, especially the poor and the oppressed. As I have stated previously, that is done locally, as well as in the larger world.
7. I encourage you to continue to unleash creativity among all the members of the Niagara community. Perhaps those involved in the theater department might consider one of its missions or objectives to work toward helping develop the creativity of all the members of the Niagara community.
8. A final point that I would like to mention before concluding, Joe, is the tremendous work that is done on all levels of the university to maintain, in an integral way, dynamism in the students' learning experience. I am particularly impressed with the efforts made, through the chaplaincy of Niagara University and campus ministry, to help the university's young people, as well as members of the faculty and staff, deepen their own faith by relating the academic experience with the service of the poor, being motivated by the love God has for all of us, his children.

I ask that the Lord pour out his love and care in a special way over Niagara University as it celebrates its 150 years of presence, service and love to the beneficiaries of the wonderful, integral education that it has provided. God bless you all.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Rome, 19 December 2006

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

The angel said to them: "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10).

Tempo Forte (4-8 December) Circular

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

The Superior General and council met from 4-8 December 2006 for their *tempo forte* session. The special session for ongoing formation was entitled: "Islam and the Poor and Poverty, A Theological Challenge." The presenter was Ahmet Eren Kademoğlu, a Muslim Theologian.

Also present at our *tempo forte* meeting was the Preparatory Commission for the International Meeting of Visitors in Mexico, as well as Father Carl Pieber of the International Development Office.

1. The **International Meeting of Visitors** will be held from 4-16 June 2007 in Mexico. The first part of the meeting will be a session dealing with ongoing formation for the Vincentian missionary today, concerning specifically young, middle-aged and older confreres. The second week will deal with different items on the Superior General's agenda, with live or written reports on the various services to the Congregation from the General Curia. Among the live reports will be the CIF program, the SIEV (International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies), the VSO (Vincentian Solidarity Office), the IDO (International Development Office), *Vincentiana* and the Vincentian Family. Among the written reports will be the NGO at the United Nations, the website, the History Project, the Think Tank Commission, as well as the reports from the Postulator and Procurator of the Congregation of the Mission. Hopefully, in dialogue among the Visitors, we will also be able to come up with some possible ideas for the 2010 General Assembly.
2. We discussed the final details for the upcoming **Workshop for Confreres in Difficulty**, which will be held in Rome from 10-16 January.

3. We decided to contract a consultant to help us in our study of the **General Archives**, as well as the library materials, here in the Curia.
4. As you may or may not know, we have been doing a changeover in our **database in the General Secretariat** for the past several months. This is a major project. We are in its final stages. We are making every effort possible to get the **Catalogue** out. With the work that has been done on the database, renewing the *Catalogue* will be much simpler in the years to come. Our hope is that it will be out at the beginning of each year. Also, as some of you may know, we have been having major difficulties with our **Internet Server**. A lot of incoming and outgoing mail has been lost in cyberspace. We made a decision to change the server. **The new address for the General Curia is:** cmcuria@cmglobal.org
5. We are looking for a new **coadjutor brother for the Curia**, who will be replacing Brother Adam Budzyna, who has served in the Curia for seven years and who will be moving on to another project at the service of the International Congregation. This will be announced at a later date. The transition from one brother to the other will probably take place sometime in the spring of 2007.
6. In discussing the **financial matters** of the General Curia, we studied and approved the budgets of the Curia Offices that are at the service of the international Congregation, as well as the budgets of our international missions.
7. This year we received 18 projects for the **Systemic Change Award for 2007**, some of which we asked to have sent for the Mission Award, instead of the Systemic Change Award. Others we have encouraged to renew their project and send it again at a later date. We chose three winners, which will be announced on 25 January 2007.
8. The Superior General and his council have named Father Carl Pieber as the **Director of the International Development Office** of the Congregation of the Mission. The Director's term of office is *ad nutum*. He will be directly accountable to the Superior General with his council, meeting with them twice a year in Rome during the *tempo forte* sessions of June and December. Carl will remain a juridical member of the Province of Philadelphia and his office will be located in the same building from which Brother Peter Campbell operates the Vincentian Solidarity Office. We are grateful to Carl for his acceptance of this responsibility in helping us to meet the ever-growing demands and needs of our poorer provinces and for other projects that are presented to the Superior General and his council for their attention. I also thank Father Thomas

McKenna, the Visitor of Philadelphia, for his generosity in allowing Father Pieber to serve in this capacity, beginning on a part-time basis.

9. We studied the report of the **NGO representative at the United Nations**. Among other workshops that Joe Foley, our UN representative, attended in October and November were some of the following: Empowering the Poor to End Poverty in Least Developed Countries, Developing a Human-Rights-Based Approach to Overcoming Poverty, Human Rights of Migrants, and Violence Against Children. Joe will be participating in five NGO committees this year: 1) the Poverty Eradication Subcommittee, 2) the Social Development Committee, 3) the Israel-Palestine Working Group, 4) the NGO Committee on International Migration, and 5) the Ecumenical Working Group.

With regard to the worldwide situation of migrants, officially there were 191 million migrants in the world in 2005. Considered from the point of view of their countries of origin, migration is largely driven by poverty, violence and social instability. Considered from the point of view of countries of destination, migrants find themselves without rights, protection or services; often abused and trafficked. Fifty-one percent of migrants are women and half of all migrants are children. At a going-away party organized by the NGOs for Kofi Annan, during his sharing he named several successes that he attributed to the NGOs involvement.

10. We received a report from Hugh O'Donnell and Juan Julián Díaz Catalán of the **CIF Program**. In his evaluation of the program, Juan Julián states: "During my time in the CIF Program it has been proven that the program has been the cause of personal renewal of the confreres, works toward the unity of the Congregation of the Mission and a greater consciousness of its internationality." He states that the confreres renew themselves profoundly according to our charism. They sense being one body, in spite of the fact that they live in different countries. They experience, in a very live way, the internationality of the Congregation. The overall difficulty that was highlighted in the report is that the program is dedicated to confreres who are not completely free to decide their participation. Those who decide are the Visitors and many times it is difficult for a Visitor to free a confrere.

Hugh O'Donnell commented on the Servant-Leadership Workshop, saying that we have a winner in this program. They hope to be able to plan another for the future in the other official languages of the Congregation. Hugh will be addressing the question of ongoing formation during the Visitors' Meeting in

June. He will be the main speaker for the ongoing formation segment of that meeting.

11. In the report from the **webmaster**, John Freund notes that we were recently favored with a very laudatory mention on CathNews: "This website from the Vincentian Family is one of the more active Catholic projects online. It aims to create an encyclopedia and dictionary of all things Vincentian." This is a comment made concerning the Vincentian Encyclopedia, which has been developed both in English and Spanish, as well as some work in German and discussions about a possible Polish version. Father Freund's assistant, Sister Gail, is working on a series of presentations that will make significant documents more readily available to a wider audience. She is also working on developing an online presentation of the *Guide for the Local Superior*, incorporating various adult learning styles. This project could be easily translated into various languages and be a useful tool for all the provinces.
12. We wish to announce publicly that Father Julio Suescun, the person responsible for the Spanish-language website of the Vincentian Family, has been named **Editor of Vincentiana** and **Executive Secretary for the programs developed by the International Secretariat of Vincentian Studies**. Julio will arrive in the Curia at the beginning of the new year. As you may know, Julio is replacing Father Alfredo Becerra in this responsibility. The latter has become the new archivist, librarian and assistant superior of the General Curia. I want to thank both Julio and Alfredo for their generous service.
13. We received a report from the **Delegate of the Superior General to the Vincentian Family**, Father Manuel Ginete. Among his most recent activities was participation in the meeting of the Vincentian Family of Central America in León, Nicaragua in October, a day of recollection for the Vincentian Family of Thailand in Bangkok in November and a session at the CIF Program in Paris at the end of November and beginning of December. At the same time, Sister María Pilar López, who also works in the Office for the Vincentian Family, participated in the Latin American Youth Pastoral Meeting in Caracas, Venezuela in October. Presently the members of the Office of the Vincentian Family, together with the Superior General, are working on the tentative agenda for the upcoming annual meeting of the international heads of some branches of the Vincentian Family, which will take place from 2-4 February 2007 in Casa Maria Immacolata in Rome. The Strategic Five-Year Plan: 2005-2010 of the Delegate for the Vincentian Family was studied.

14. The **International Mission in the Solomon Islands** will be initiating, in 2007, a formation program for candidates for the Congregation of the Mission. The overall responsibility of this formation program will fall on the Province of Australia.
15. Our two newest missionaries to the **International Mission in El Alto, Bolivia**, Fathers Fernando Sánchez and Cyrille de Nanteuil finished up a two-month program of animation and renewal for missionaries. A more detailed evaluation of the program is being put together by the Assistant for Missions, Father José Antonio Ubillús.
16. We received a petition from the Regional Superior of the Daughters of Charity in **Albania-Kosovo** for a confrere to assist in the spiritual animation of the sisters. We are in the process of naming a subdirector for the Daughters of Charity there, who are members of the Province of Slovenia.
17. We studied the offers of 12 **volunteers for the missions ad gentes**. Hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, two or three of them will be placed, while others have been asked to mature their requests for a couple of years. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the members of the Congregation of the Mission who, in one way or another are exercising their ministry in mission territories, whether they be international missions, sponsored by the General Curia, or missions that are sponsored by different provinces or vice-provinces of the Congregation of the Mission.
18. The Superior General has named Father Pedro Castillo for another three-year period as **Subdirector of the JMV International Council and Director of the JMV International Secretariat**. I want to thank Pedro for his generous service, which he has carried on in recent years. May God give him the energy to follow through in this responsibility for another three years. I am also grateful to the Visitor and Province of Venezuela for their generosity in permitting this young member of their province to serve the international Congregation by serving the Vincentian Marian Youth.
19. At the last Assembly of the **Union of Superiors General**, I was elected to the Executive Council, representing Societies of Apostolic Life. My responsibilities will entail another series of meetings, around the same dates as the biannual meeting of the Union of Superiors General. At the same time, I will be coordinating the meeting of the members of the Societies of Apostolic Life, which is held prior to the Assembly of the Union of Superiors General.
20. The Assistants and myself are continually updating our calendars, planning **visits and canonical visitations** of the

different provinces of the Congregation of the Mission. As you can imagine, it is not an easy task to schedule visits or canonical visitations for the number of provinces that we have in the Congregation. I ask the Visitors for their collaboration in the planning of these visits, above all with the Assistants, who are mainly responsible for the canonical visits. I also ask the openness of the other members of the provinces by their participation in these visits so that we, as a General Council, might have a truer sense of the Congregation of the Mission and its needs and, therefore, determine how we can best respond in our role as animators.

I take this opportunity to offer all you a Blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with passion for Christ and passion for humanity, especially for the poor.

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful from David's throne and over his kingdom (Isaiah 9:5-6a).

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "G." and "C.M." clearly visible.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

A Christmas Story for Advent 2006

It was sometime around the beginning of Advent that a group of men from the Social Club approached me about the possibility of donating gifts for young children in one of the more distant villages for which I was responsible. I chose one of the villages on the coast. I drew up a list of the ages of the children and presented it to the members of the men's society. But along with the proposal, I suggested that instead of them giving me the gifts, that they come with me to visit the village, to meet the children and to distribute the gifts. They were delighted with that possibility.

On Christmas Day we mounted three jeeps and drove along the Pacific Coast. The tide was in our favor as we rolled along the beach to one of the furthest villages that I visited at that time in my ministry. I could not believe the number of children who were waiting for us at the entrance to the village. Thank God, there was plenty to be shared. As we drew closer, it was striking to see their wide eyes and the looks of joy, as they anticipated receiving a toy, just a simple toy, that perhaps some had never ever received in their entire life. The gentlemen were delighted to have the opportunity to bring some brightness into the lives of these small village children.

The first part of the dynamic was that the young men belonging to the club met all the children, calling each by name, playing a series of games with them, which created a truly festive environment. Then the gifts were distributed. What joy and excitement there was as they unwrapped the packages to find out what gift had been given them. They quickly went to their parents, mom or dad or both, and showed them with great delight what they had received, something that they could call their very own.

Yet, at that very moment what struck me was the attitude of the parents. As they observed their child's gift, they immediately began to compare it with the gifts of others and then asking their children to claim something bigger and better than the others. What at the beginning had been the delightful reception of a cherished gift, turned out to be a fiasco of havoc, anger and confusion.

The positive aspect of this experience was that each of the men made a choice not just to donate money or hand over a gift to me so that I might distribute it to the poor children. Rather, each chose to participate in the event, which gave him the opportunity to see how the people in a distant village lived and the joy that a simple gift could bring to the life of a poor child, to come to know that child by name and to interact in such a way that a bit of happiness might be brought to his or her heart.

The negative aspects were the attitudes of the adults, which, in some sense, abruptly brought an end to an environment of joy that had been created in a very simple, personal, relational way. So often the desire to live a better material life, by comparing what one has to what others have, can create such negative attitudes as greed, selfishness, discontent, which can even move toward violence and a lack of respect for the wellbeing of others. And these attitudes are passed on from parent to child!

I reflected a bit more deeply on the question of how "anti-values" get transmitted and can bring about the destruction of a once peaceful, harmonious, joyful environment. As Christians, as well as all people of good will, we are called to create environments of harmony, peace, happiness, joy. We do so by passing on or transmitting values that are of an evangelical nature, values that we call religious. But obviously, we cannot pass on those values unless we have them ourselves. They are values which have been passed on to us from our families and Community heritage.

Let us take a look at this story in the light of the Constitutions and Statutes to see in what way it can help us in our preparation for Christmas 2006 during this Advent season. The prayer of Christians for generations at this time of year is "*Maranatha*." "*Come, Lord Jesus*." We, as Vincentians, create an environment for the Lord's presence when we invite others to participate in the life of the poor, when we invite others to come and see where and how the poor live. We, as Vincentians, create the possibility of the Lord's coming in our midst when we make that personal contact with the poor and when we see them no longer as poor, but as friends (C 10; 11; 12, 3^o; 18; 78, § 4).

The second reflection that could be beneficial in this Advent season concerns the transmission of anti-values, or, better yet, the call to promote values that are Gospel-oriented. What is needed today more than ever are those values or attitudes necessary to combat the anti-values that dominate our world. To do so, we certainly need to call out, with greater force: *Come, Lord Jesus. Give us the strength that we need to be firm in the values that you have taught us through the Gospels*. One of the greatest values that has been passed on to us down through the ages is our faith. It is the gift of faith which

enables us to be like the small children with the wide-eyed look of wonderment, as we have presented before us a cherished gift, which is the Lord Jesus himself (C 77, § 2). The gift comes as word or sacrament (C 78, § 2). It is the cherished gift of God's little ones, or of the Lord Jesus himself, discovered in relationships with those in community, or found in the depths of our being (C 44).

We contemplate God's goodness in the many, many ways that it has been revealed to us. Continually and gently God invites us to repeat over and over and over again, *Come, Lord Jesus*. Let this time of Advent, be for each and everyone of you, my brothers, a significant time of prayer (C 25, 3°). Make sure you can take time, make time and consider it precious time, sacred time to be with the Lord. He is a precious gift, a cherished gift, whom we receive and whom we give. As Vincentians, we are called to be men of prayer. Those we are called to serve see us as pray-ers and how deceived they are when they fail to see that witness. Those we are called to serve see us as experts in prayer and how saddened they are when they experience the shallowness of our words. Those whom we are called to serve, as well as others, are drawn to men and women of prayer. When they fail to see that prayer is a fundamental aspect of our lives, they no longer find us attractive and they simply walk away. If our prayer is rushed, shallow, repetitious, wordy, or even lifeless, what a scandal it can be to those who hope to see us as men of prayer.

Let this time of Advent, my brothers, be a time to reflect on the quality of your prayer, the depth of your prayer, the source of your prayer (C 40). Let one of the main ingredients of your prayer be the Word of God, as we hear it proclaimed in the bible, the Word of God that is proclaimed on the lips of those who cry out to us for help and compassion. It is the Word of God that is exchanged between all those whom we call friends, whether they be members of the community, whether they be those whom we serve out of love, whether they be other members of our Vincentian Family, those of our Church, those whom we meet on a daily basis (C 44).

Let silence too be one of the ingredients of prayer so that we can truly, in the depths of our hearts, listen to what God says to us. Silence is necessary in order to hear with clarity the gentle voice of the Lord who speaks his love to us, his love for us (C 43).

Let another ingredient be time. Let there be sufficient time dedicated at the beginning of our day. Pause in the course of the day to slow down, come to a halt, so that you might hear what the Lord desires to tell you. Let there be time dedicated at the end of the day to recognize the goodness and graces with which you and others have been blessed in the course of the day, as well as to ask forgiveness for the graces to which you did not respond (C 45; 47).

Let another ingredient be space, sacred space, space we can call special, a place of encounter, a place of peace, a place that can be easily identified as God's place. That space can be shared with others, with friends in community, with the poor, with the young, with the elderly or it can be shared just between ourselves and God (C 46).

As Vincentians, prayer is intimately linked to action. "Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of anything" (SV XI, 83; C 41). Contemplation and service are united in the life of a Vincentian. They nourish each other. They influence each other mutually. By way of this intimate union of prayer and mission, the Vincentian becomes a contemplative in action, an apostle in prayer (C 42).

As a conclusion, my brothers, let us join in prayer, as Vincentians, with the rest of our Family and God's entire people, *Come, Lord Jesus, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of your love.*

As Saint Vincent reminds us:

Prayer is a great book for a preacher: from it you will draw the divine truths of the Eternal Word, who is their source, and you in turn will pour them forth on the people. It is to be hoped that all Missionaries may have a great love for this virtue, for without its help they will do little or nothing useful, but with its help it is certain that they will touch hearts. I ask God to give us the spirit of prayer (SV VII, 156; English edition VII, 171).

May you have a Blessed Advent and a Holy Christmas.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.".

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

FEATURE:

The Vincentian Missionary Vocation

Presentation

by Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.

Editor of "Vincentiana"

We present to you this issue dedicated to "*The Vincentian Missionary Vocation*." The authors represent various cultures, settings, and experiences. Some of the articles describe the religious vocation, or the consecrated life, still others are directly Vincentian. We thank the authors for sharing their reflections with us. Enjoy the reading!

We begin with a provocative article, "*Religious Life and Cultural Challenges*," by **Antônio Aparecida da Silva, fdp**. He writes of various challenges for religious life in the area of formation. When these challenges are taken up in formation they help to instill a sense of identity within a Congregation. We are invited to open our hearts and minds to consider inculturation and/or the multicultural approach because it is a better way to work in the service of the poor.

Fernando Macías Fernández, C.M., presents his article "*Quality of Life in the Vincentian Missionary Vocation*," in which he shares a reflection on the importance of the quality of one's personal and communal life. The quality of life is related to faithfulness in living the vocation. It is this characteristic of life that guarantees the gift of self on behalf of the poor and the marginalized. They have a right to discover in us, Vincentian missionaries, men who are happy, enthusiastic, optimistic, and committed to them. He writes with a style that is both colloquial and concrete in order to help us understand the importance of improving the quality of our common life.

José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M., Minister General of the Order, offers the following reflection: "*Option for the Whole Life*," in which he takes up the problematic aspect of perseverance among members in commitment to religious or consecrated life. This article sheds light on the various sources for this problem. The author writes of a few characteristics of our times and of its young people. He presents a profile of our young religious and names the challenges for pastoral work in promoting vocations, as well as the implications for initial and ongoing formation.

What motivates the Vincentian missionary? Why might I want to be a Vincentian? What are the possible inconsistencies of the life which characterize a missionary who abandons the Congregation of the Mission? These are some of the questions that are taken up by **Limus Umoren, C.M.**, in his article entitled, "*The Phenomenon of Departure from the Congregation from a Psychological Point of View: Intrapsychic Dynamics*." The author discusses the Vincentian vocation as a religious calling and the value that it embodies. At the center of his presentation he gives concrete examples so that the reader will better understand the meaning of his arguments.

Finally, **Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.**, in his article, "*Living Evangelical Celibacy in Times of Crisis*," proposes that we assume the challenge of chastity as "the capacity for directing the sexual instinct for a life of service," and of integrating and harmonizing sexuality in the development of persons. The author refers to the present cultural context with regard to human sexuality (that goes from valuing sexuality to libertinism). This cultural tendency has repercussions upon the living of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. For this reason, it is necessary to discern our identity as belonging to God and at the service of others. We are chosen for the service of love. Let us deepen some of the positive dimensions of celibacy: the charismatic dimension, the free option and the love of communion and self-giving, its prophetic dimension, its identification with the service of the poorest people of our time.

Dear readers, there remain several other elements for our reflection that we should bear in mind. Permit me to propose a few questions in this regard: What are my motivations for service as a Vincentian? How do we live our Vincentian vocation today? Am I aware of the inconsistencies surrounding my vocation? If so, do I seek means to resolve them? Am I concerned with keeping alive the flame of my vocation? How are we living co-responsibly in our Vincentian missionary vocation? Do we live our evangelical commitment to celibacy in an integrated manner which is positive, joyful, enthusiastic, and which disposes us to the service of the poorest? How do we live out our commitment to the Congregation? Are we building communities that encourage the members to grow in

their vocation? What is our attitude toward a priest or confrere who is going through a time crisis?

Brothers, we carry our treasure in earthen vessels and for that reason we need to maintain a deep and solid spiritual foundation. Celibacy cannot be lived fully and in the perfection of life if it lacks what one would call its mystical dimension, that is, an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Moreover, celibacy presupposes that the love of Christ comes before any other love. Because we speak of a relationship, it is necessary to maintain it through a personal asceticism founded on discipline, abundant prayer, the reception of the sacraments, an intimacy with Jesus Christ, and, finally, contact with and direct service of the poor.

(GREGORY J. SEMENIUK, C.M., translator)

Religious Life and Cultural Challenges

by Antônio Aparecido da Silva, fdp¹

Introduction

There is a general consensus about the importance and the relevance of certain themes. Among some of the principal themes we could list the question of globalization, the urgency of ethics, religious pluralism and the autonomy of culture. With regard to this matter, the theologian Jacques Dupuis notes that *there is a new situation that perhaps we are not as aware of as we should be; namely, that there exists in the world not only a pluralism of human cultures and religious traditions but also that each one of these cultures and traditions has certain rights.*²

These questions of culture and their manifestations have concerned not only the world as a whole, but also particular religious groups. In the Catholic Church, for example, the constant reflections on the theme of inculturation reveal the concern and interest concerning the question of culture and its religious manifestations. The same concern is also shared by Congregations and Institutes of Religious Life.

Today religious life finds itself in a process that presents a dual concern. On the one hand, religious life feels the inevitable need to be open to women and men candidates who seek religious life but come from different cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, this diversified presence, that is viewed with satisfaction and a hope for vitality for the religious institutes, brings with it new demands that are reflected especially in the area of formation.

In order to respond to the challenges that emerge from this new reality, religious life, in its distinct moments, is preparing and looking for ways that will help it to overcome these problems. Some conferences and numerous congregations have provided courses that were mindful of the orientation of the formators, that is, in the sense of how to work with this new group of candidates from various cultures who are entering religious life.

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² JACQUES DUPUIS, "El diálogo Interreligioso en Epoca de Pluralismo," in *Selecciones de Teología*, nº 153 / vol. 39-2000.

1. Religious Life and the Challenges that Arise from Culture

The problem between Church and culture and, consequently, the problem between culture and religious life is not something new. We are mindful of the observation of Pope Paul VI concerning this question when he referred to this problem in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, stating that: *the split between the gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times.*³

Perhaps more than a confrontation between the Church or religious life and culture, the problem is rooted in the fact that both of these realities have been historically connected with Western culture. The consequences of this bond become apparent in every place and on every continent where the actions of the Church and religious life are proposed from a Western perspective resulting in a very distinct way of life. This was noted by the bishops present in the Latin American Episcopal Assembly in Santo Domingo: *Although Latin America and the Caribbean are multicultural, they are deeply marked by Western culture, whose memory, consciousness and aspirations are even present in our prevailing common way of life.*⁴

Cultures are truly open to the gospel. *Culture means cultivating and expressing the full range of the human person in a loving relationship with nature and the community dimension of peoples. When, through the Incarnation, Jesus assumes and expresses everything human except sin, the Word of God enters into culture... Jesus Christ took flesh in his people's culture and therefore brings to each historical culture the gift of purification and fullness. All the central values and expressions that can be oriented to Christ foster what is genuinely human.*⁵ The action of God, through his Spirit, is forever given to the interior elements of all cultures.

1.1. The Emergence of New Cultural Subjects

In recent times, culture has reappeared with fundamental values of reference. This is a curious fact because, at a time when globalization forces a cultural homogenization, in all parts of the world, individuals and groups seek to recover their own identity in light of their culture. Perhaps this is an explicit form of resistance to the equalizing element of globalization. Castells notes that *during the last quarter century we have witnessed the advance of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenges globalization and*

³ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

⁴ Fourth General Council of Latin American Bishops, Conclusions, 252.

⁵ Fourth General Council of Latin American Bishops, Conclusions, 228.

*cosmopolitanism in function of cultural singularity and control of persons over their own lives and environment.*⁶

On the American continent as a whole, this century, which has just been concluded, but especially the decade of the 1960s, has been marked by a recovery of cultural values, especially among blacks and indigenous people. Culture, though often fragmented by the process of colonization, is the primary reference point for the construction of black and indigenous identity. In these cases, the category of identity does not simply indicate a function or a role but rather a *process of construction of meaning that is based on a cultural attribute or, even more, based on a group of attributes that are interrelated and which prevail over other sources of meaning.*⁷

It is important to distinguish between two levels of cultural recovery. The first level, we might say, occurs in societies that are culturally homogenous. In these cases the cultural point of reference is the homogenous reality that configures the State-Nation. Today it becomes more difficult to find societies that are totally homogenous. What occurs frequently is that the dominant culture that is identified with the State or country impedes the emergence of other cultural expressions (minorities) and this includes the denial of their existence and their right to exist.

At the same time minority cultures, because they are unable to bond together or react because of a lack of objective conditions, end up accepting the official discourse of the only culture, that is, the culture of the State-Nation. This practice becomes law and is undertaken with great nationalistic pride. In America, a classical example of what we are speaking about occurs in Argentina where, despite the presence of more than a million non-Europeans, people insist on speaking about one people and one culture.

The second level of cultural recovery occurs in situations marked by cultural pluralism and asymmetrical relationships. With few exceptions this is the case of our America as a whole: *Latin America and the Caribbean constitute a multiethnic and a multicultural continent on which indigenous, African American, and multi-racial peoples and those descending from Europeans and Asians live together. Each has its own culture, which provides it with its own social identity in accord with each people's world vision, but they seek unity on the basis of their Christian identity.*⁸

⁶ MANUEL CASTELLS, *O poder da Identidades*, Paz e Terra, San Paulo 2000, p. 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸ Fourth General Council of Latin American Bishops, Conclusions, 244.

Therefore, on the second level, cultural recovery appears to be an awareness of one's own identity. It is a process marked by tension because not only are we dealing with the irruption of oppressed cultures, but also with the emerging social actors who arise from these cultures. These actors are being seen and designated as "new cultural subjects." Even though this term might not be totally appropriate, since they are not always "new," nevertheless they have helped to accentuate this new phase of awareness that arises from the oppressed cultures.

In America as a whole and, more particularly in Latin America and in the Caribbean, this new consciousness, that is expressed by new practices and that places new demands on the civil and ecclesial levels, has been in process since the decade of the 1960s, which saw the resurgence of popular movements. The black movement and indigenous organizations reorganized themselves and more and more the new cultural subjects, blacks and indigenous women and men, became present on the national, regional and continental stages.

2. The Openness of Religious Life to Black and Indian Men and Women

The difficulties of religious life and the Church in relation to non-Western and non-European cultures bring with them characteristics from the past. It was primarily with the Second Vatican Council that religious life and ecclesiastical structures began to open themselves to blacks and indigenous peoples. The few people who previously were able to overcome the barriers could be considered exceptions and, in those cases, very often had to submit themselves to a different treatment, as though there were two categories among the members of some institutes, where some were considered "choir members" and others "lay members." This meant that those who were white were destined to become teachers while those who were black were destined to perform servile work.

At the beginning of the 1960s, rather recently as can be seen, in many countries and regions, religious life and certain sectors of the Church discussed whether or not they should receive black and indigenous men and women. For example, this was the case with the Religious Conference in Brazil that held an assembly in 1960 to discuss with the major superiors if they should receive black men and women into the religious life.⁹ With the advent of the Council the impediments began to be withdrawn and a gradual openness can be verified.

⁹ Cf. ANTÔNIO APARECIDO DA SILVA, *Comunidade negra: Interpelações à la VR*, CRB, Rio de Janeiro, 1988.

2.1. *Reasons for the Openness*

It would have been good if the openness of the Church and religious life to Black and indigenous women and men was a natural result of the evangelical practice that was in vogue among both groups. But this was not what occurred. It was a gradual process, filled with innuendos, hints, suggestions, and implications, whose difficulties even today have not been completely overcome. Among others, I would like to call attention to three reasons that led to this openness.

The first reason is due to the action of the Black Movement in civil society, a movement that became strong during the second half of the 20th century. This action resulted in the promulgation of laws that legally penalized the practice of racial discrimination. For this reason, many congregations and orders, as well as diocesan seminaries that had directories that formerly prohibited entrance to blacks and indigenous candidates had to modify, under penalty of the law, these directories. They were unable to continue the practice of discriminatory acts with the same insensitivity.

The second reason can be attributed to the new air that the Church and her institutions began to breathe as a result of the convocation of the Second Vatican Council. Nevertheless, after the Council, there was a general break-up of religious life and also of the ministerial priesthood. As a result there began a period when the Church experienced a lack of vocations and this fact, in a certain way, led to the new openness.

The third reason is related to the new options that the Church and religious life made with regard to the evangelization of our continent, options that began with the Episcopal Assembly in Medellín. The option for the poor that was made with the popular sectors of society was seen not only as the primary place for the Church's pastoral action but also as an area for vocational recruitment. Vocations arose among the popular classes and, therefore, black and indigenous men and women were attracted.

3. *Difficulties and Solutions*

The number of Black and indigenous vocations are increasing and, at the same time that amends are being made for the past, we begin to see a new vitality in religious life. Pope John Paul II has been vocal about this increase of vocations from all cultures. In Santo Domingo he emphasized that it is necessary *to make efforts to encourage vocations to arise out of all the cultures present in our local church*.¹⁰ In his message directed to Afro-Americans on the occasion

¹⁰ Fourth General Council of Latin American Bishops, Conclusions, 80.

of the same assembly in Santo Domingo, he expressed this idea in the following words: *I ask God that your Christian communities may give rise to many vocations to the priesthood and the religious life so that the African-Americans of the Continent may be able to rely on ministers from their own culture.*¹¹ Speaking to the Indians he expressed the same desire: *What a great joy it will be to see the day when your communities can be served by missionaries, priests and bishops who come from your own families and can guide you in adoring God.*¹²

Today, in response to and in harmony with the appeal of the Holy Father, thanks to God, various religious congregations and diocesan seminaries have among their members a variety of cultures from distinct origins. This is a motive for great satisfaction. Nevertheless problems have occurred that can be considered normal within these circumstances but they also demand a profound analysis and some decision.

Difficulties that in other times were limited to the access to religious life are accentuated in three characteristic moments of the formation process of the institutes, that is, vocational promotion and acceptance of candidates, initial formation, and ongoing formation.

3.1. Vocational Promotion and Acceptance of Candidates

The problems that occur during this phase are in some way related to the ancient practice of barriers that impeded access to religious life and the seminary. There are Institutes that have promoted vocations only in areas where the inhabitants are of European descent or where the culture is homogenous. These Institutes do not trust the popular groups or the fact that "good" vocations can arise from the Black and indigenous population.

Vocations arise from a religious environment and this type of atmosphere is often found in Black families. It is necessary, however, that these young men and women have models whom they can look up to and who attract them to religious life and the priesthood. Boys and girls, who do not see black and indigenous religious women and priests, do not believe that they themselves are able one day to become priests or religious. It is necessary to have models whom they can see and who can affirm them.

Many times the difficulties in this phase of promotion and acceptance arise from the fact that candidates feel encouraged to enter religious life as a result of the contact that they have had with

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Message to African-Americans*, 12 October 1992, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

a particular man or woman religious and think that the whole Institute acts in the same way. When they enter the Institute they realize that the majority of the members feel differently. At times, the person who was known by the candidate and whose actions encouraged the individual to enter the Institute is, in fact, someone who is persecuted and viewed as on the margins of the same Institute.

Frequently there have been cases of "deceitful propaganda." Vocational promotion presents expectations that, in fact, it does not have. Today there is much talk about the actualization of the charism of the founder when, in practice, religious life often presents itself as excessively institutionalized and unattractive. Only then does the candidate realize that he/she has been the victim of "deceitful propaganda" and that deception has occurred.

A number of times the problem arises because of the inadequacy of the environment. The candidate is withdrawn from his/her popular environment and is transported to a middle class situation where each religious lives his/her reality in an individualistic way without any community witness or commitment. The community has become a true religious boarding house. In these cases, the experiences and relationships of the candidates before entering religious life will be of help to them.

3.2. Initial Formation

It is in the formation process as a whole, but especially during the period of initial formation, that problems, in general and also those problems that revolve around cultural pluralism, arise with greater intensity. Frequently the formators are not prepared for this new and challenging reality. In their preparation to undertake their role, the formators were sent to Europe to drink from the fountain of the charism and fill themselves with the spirituality and the customs of the institute but they were in no way formed and at times the formators lack even the minimum information about the culture of the candidates they are forming.

3.2.1. Adapted Formation

From the perspective of formation and culture there are three situations that must be considered. The first situation occurs in cultural environments that are in proximity to the European matrix. This is the case, for example, of those environments where multi-culturalism predominates. In this situation one must try to provide a formation that is adapted to the candidates and their culture.

3.2.2. *Inculturated Formation from an Indigenous and Black Perspective*

The second situation occurs in environments that are predominately African or Indian. In these cases simple adaptation is not enough but rather an inculturated formation is necessary. This implies that the formators have knowledge of the fundamental elements of the African and Indian cultures. The lack of this knowledge has increased tension in houses of formation and provoked the departure of good candidates. More than ever it is necessary that formators be convinced of the fact that the candidates participate in the formation process.

It is necessary that the formation process contemplate the needs of the candidates especially in regards to cultural presuppositions. More than ever before it is necessary that the candidates be viewed as subjects in the formation process. The formation program ought to help an inculturated formation. For example, it is important that the candidates maintain contact with African groups and therefore it is very appropriate for them to become involved in pastoral ministry toward Africans and indigenous people.

This applies not only to those candidates who are aware of their cultural values, but more especially to those who do not have this awareness. Candidates who do not wrestle with the question of their African or indigenous ethnic-cultural identity will be problematic religious later on. They will be religious who carry with them inferiority complexes and, in general, will manifest an exaggerated sensitivity that will see everything with racial overtones. Therefore, in these cases it is necessary that the formators help the candidates to discover and assume their proper identity.

An inculturated formation motivates the candidates to express their cultural values through liturgy and other moments of community life. It is necessary to allow the candidates to have an experience of the common charism of the founders without setting aside their own cultural values. This will enable them to enrich the charism from their own experience. Many problems in formation occur because of a lack of sensitivity to important particular elements of culture. At times the formators themselves have problems with their identity, because they have not assumed their identity.

3.2.3. *Inculturated Formation from the Perspective of Pluralism*

The third situation occurs in those formation environments where there is no predominance of one culture but a true diversity of cultures: popular, African, indigenous and others. In these cases an

inculturated formation process is also necessary. Sensitivity to the distinct cultures of the particular candidates is very important.

In the first place we must realize that just as in the past formation in the tradition of religious life was marked by discipline and uniformity of action, so now creativity and awareness of the cultural differences are necessary in an inculturated formation in multi-cultural environments. At times in the same community a *no* spoken to one candidate has different connotations from the same *no* that is said to another candidate. The reactions reveal different cultures. The inattentive formator is tempted to treat everyone the same when, in reality, the candidates are quite different.

Experiences in the houses of formation, where there exist a diversity of cultures, show that the charism of the institute has a certain bonding function. It is in this environment that the individuals, though they maintain their differences, will find a common point of connection. An inculturated formation is a path with a double meaning; that is, it concerns the formation that is directed toward the candidates, but also involves their formation in the charism and the culture of the tradition that gives shape to the institute as a whole. It can be said that the charism forms a certain culture, that is, a certain way of being and acting that includes one's own identity. A Jesuit is different from a Franciscan and both are equally distinct from Dominicans. The charism makes them different even though they have before them the same ideals of religious life. Therefore, it is necessary that the candidates be open to and willing to assume this tradition; that is, to be aware of the fact that the institute is not now beginning with them but rather has a history in which they are now participating and has a mission that they must carry on.

3.3. Ongoing Formation

The three moments of the formation process in religious life, even though distinct, are closely related and their boundaries are at times confused, especially when dealing with the question of initial formation and ongoing formation. During the process of formation, and through experiences of insertion or of a committed community life, the candidates must find ways to express their solidarity. They must open themselves to people living on the margins of society, to the realities of African, indigenous and popular groups. This option, that ought to be natural in order to enter into the incarnational process that is necessary for religious life, provokes serious difficulties. Many congregations do not allow their candidates to work in specifically poor areas and prefer that they are in middle or upper class schools.

In this phase religious candidates, who are identified with their cultural origins, in some circumstances, feel the need to participate in initiation rites of the religious tradition of their people of origin: African, Indian. When this occurs, a tense climate and powerful pressures are created. Perhaps a minimum knowledge of these religious phenomena and their legitimate manifestations enables one to overcome prejudgments and seemingly unfathomable barriers. Not everything is so simple, but certainly not everything is as complicated as one might imagine. Nothing that is profoundly human ought to scandalize us.

It is important to note the reasons that lead a woman or man religious to the practice of African or Indian initiation rituals. This practice should not be seen as contradicting their Christian faith or the ideals of religious life. Rather they should be understood as actions that identify these individuals with the reasons that have led them to donate themselves as women and men religious. These are questions that ought to lead to more profound reflection. In the meantime, it is necessary to be careful, and yet open, so that there is discernment and so that we do not lose men and women religious because of false motives or even less because of gross ignorance.

4. The Question of Identity

In the three previous moments we spoke about identity. It is a central theme but it is not easy. In face of the challenges today, we do not speak of identity in a homogenous or primitive society where the anthropological (ethnic), cultural (religious forms) and geographical elements characterize and express the totality of one's identity. Today the great challenge to any reflection on identity is the factor of pluralism and racial diversity.

We are not going to enter into the particular aspects of this theme, nor are we going to enter more profoundly into this reflection. It would be too long of a reflection. We only want to highlight some questions that frequently arise in religious life. Formators and those being formed and other religious women and men are equally convinced of the importance of identity and yet very often find themselves in difficult situations because they are heirs of diverse ethnic-cultural origins. There are some people who are descendants of the white race or the black race, the Indian race, etc. In these cases the question is frequently: What identity do I assume?

I would like to remind you that, besides the anthropological, cultural and historical elements, identity for us is, above all, a theological and spiritual question. The foundation of this spiritual question resides in the fact of the Incarnation. Jesus, even though he

was divine (cf. Philippians 2), that is, even though his identity was divine, took on the human condition in all things except sin. That is to say, Jesus took on a human identity in its totality. Therefore, to take on our identity in light of the faith is to repeat the event of Jesus and go out to the poorest of the poor. Hence, if there are some doubts about the anthropological references, these doubts do not exist from a faith perspective. Even though we might have different origins, this does not impede us from assuming our identity with the poorest of the poor.

5. New Forms of Religious Life

The history of religious life has been characterized by the immergence of new institutes and forms of life. In our current history this phenomenon continues to occur. At the same time we have also witnessed the "re-foundation of religious life." The causes of the immergence of new institutes and new forms of consecration are diverse. At times we have the impression that certain older forms no longer respond to the needs of today. At other times it seems that the new forms respond to new challenges. This phenomenon is also present in African and Indian religious life.

In light of the challenges that arise from cultural realities, we are able to visualize, among others, two prominent possibilities. The first one expresses the desires of founding new institutes of religious and consecrated life that are inculturated from the perspective of the realities of the culture of the new candidates. This is not surprising since in Latin America we have seen the establishment of indigenous congregations of women. Also during the post-Conciliar years autonomous religious institutes have arisen in some African nations.

The creation of new institutes has led to new forms and styles of religious life that have drawn their members closer to poor people who are black and indigenous. These institutes, which are not closed to those who are neither black nor of mixed ethnic background, seek a community life more appropriate to the African and indigenous cultural values. They give a privileged place to the insertion of the new candidates into those neighborhoods that are forgotten about, or areas where members of the black community live, as well as zones where indigenous people are found.

The second possibility is found in that which is in process, that is, a multi-cultural common life. In order for this process to move forward, it is clear that much work is necessary in the sense of helping the religious candidates to overcome the only cultural reference to which they are accustomed. It is not right that black and indigenous candidates should continue to experience themselves as

disregarded, sacrificed and unattended to. Congregations have to be aware of the fact that the process of inculturation is urgent.

One of the primary tasks is to eliminate the evil of racist language. At times the words that are used, either directly or in some veiled way, express a profound racism against blacks and indigenous people. Many times these are the motives behind the jokes that people tell and which are not seen as "funny" by those people who are being referred to. At times, when things are going bad, it is said that "things are looking black." There have been times when a racist expression of a superior has discouraged candidates in the community. The process of inculturation in religious communities demands overcoming these habits and, at the same time, substituting new practices, that is, being born again.

6. Final Considerations

As can be seen, it is not enough that religious life has opened its doors to black and indigenous men and women, but rather an adequate cultivation of these candidates is necessary. The presence of black and indigenous candidates is giving a new face to religious life. The difficulties will certainly be overcome. The way to overcome these is not achieved by going backwards. Rather, we are on a path of no return. Recently, in a Central American country, a religious congregation decided not to receive native vocations for a two-year period, believing that this would resolve the existing tensions. This is truly a mistaken position and equally mistaken is that attitude of men and women superiors who think that they will *save* the men or women candidates by depriving them of all contact with their people and traditions.

Religious communities, which have become more pluralistic from the point of view of ethnicity and culture, demand that superiors and all the members of these communities become sensitive to this new reality. Nevertheless, while this constitutes a challenge to religious life, it is good to affirm the fact that we are not dealing with something that is impossible. Giving culture a value and making culture a way in which one is able to give witness to the original following of Jesus are practices that enable communities to recover the universal spirit of the Gospel. Jesus has come for all people so that all people might become his disciples.

An inculturated religious life is certainly one of the important proofs of the reality of *re-founding religious life*. This presents us with a double demand. On the one hand, we have to be sensitive and open to culture. We have to understand the richness and the values of culture, as well as respect the cultural characteristics of the brothers

and sisters who form part of our communities. On the continent there are very good examples of communities that live this spirit of multiculturalism. On the other hand, it is also necessary to keep before us the fact that for ourselves, as women and men who are following Jesus, culture is not the ultimate reference point. All of us must allow ourselves to be challenged by the Gospel that moves beyond culture and yet helps us to understand culture.

Perhaps we, blacks and indigenous people, will be the last flower of religious life on this great continent. We are, however, also sure that here we are making the garden more beautiful and that we are awakening people to the cultural richness that God has bestowed on us.

(CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M., translator)

Quality of Life in the Vincentian Missionary Vocation

by Fernando Macías Fernández, C.M.

Province of Chile

The Church, Institutes of Consecrated Life, the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity have recently been talking about **rekindling the fire, refounding, renewing, and revitalizing**. These words are not as important as the reality that they imply because each of these words points toward one great truth: we are not satisfied with the way we are living our lives; we are not satisfied with what we are doing and we experience that something is happening around us or within us that is not right. Perhaps we have achieved many accomplishments in our pastoral or academic ministry or in our apostolic and missionary life, but perhaps we have not achieved an **evangelical efficacy** in regards to who we are and what we do.

Throughout these years we have undertaken a process of evaluating our lives, our vocation, and our works. We have strengthened our community life, reorganized our ministries, undertaken new tasks, confronted crises and made commitments to the world and the Church and made further commitments to the proper demands of our Vincentian vocation.

Perhaps the hour has come *to look for that which alone is necessary*. Perhaps the hour has come to center our attention on the most primordial objective: to look for a *quality of life in our personal, community and missionary life*. This is a legitimate, necessary and obligatory ideal in our vocation. A qualitative life will be revealed in a qualitative missionary life, a qualitative community life, and this in turn will lead to a more enthusiastic and happy vocational life, a sense of satisfaction in being and doing that involves our entire vocational life and our total following of Jesus Christ, evangelizing the poor.

To Look for the Quality of Life, a Sign of the Times?

We speak about the quality of life because this is an undeniable ideal of the great gift that we have received from God. It is an ideal that, according to some people, has become an obsession in almost every part of our society. Everything is judged and related to from the perspective of the ideal of the quality of life: birth and death, health and illness, work and rest, work time and vacation time. Professionals in psychology, medicine, diets, business and gyms dedicate themselves unceasingly to the ideal of the quality of life. The quality of life is a profitable ideal because it has become a true obsession for men and women of our time and numerous necessities have been generated by this ideal.

We can look at all of this in a distinct way, that is, we can look at this *ad intra*, look at ourselves as missionaries and as people who are attentive to the signs of the times. Indeed, the first part of our Constitutions, which refer to our vocation, invite us to do just that. In our Constitutions we are invited to look at the signs of the times in our life, not only as they refer to our work or the process of evangelization but especially as they refer to the living out of our vocation. We have to allow this powerful call to question us; that is, we have to allow this call concerning the quality of life to question the way we are living and the way we donate our life to the poor.

What is Understood by Quality of Life?

In the first place, quality of life refers to the proper functioning of the human faculties, that is, our psychic, bodily, moral and social faculties. When human beings function well, they achieve a level of well-being that results in a quality of life. Quality of life is an intense life that is not lived half-heartedly, but rather a life in which people put their whole heart into what they do. In this sense the quality of life becomes identified with the quality of our relationships, our affective life, and our ability to love and be loved.

To carry on an intense life, which is developed by not allowing opportunities to pass us by, is to return to a decision to live life fully and that is especially true if we have allowed ourselves to become caught up in routine or if the direction of our life has become blurred. If we are not content with our present life then to achieve or to better the quality of life means that we renew life and reinforce our convictions and our options in life. Thus we achieve a bodily, emotional, psychic and spiritual harmony which leads us to the fullness of a happy life and consequently a more joyful and fuller vocational life.

What is Our Quality of Life?

We have been too concerned about reforms and the renewal of our works and ministries, too concerned about the challenges and struggles and the old and new commitments in our missionary life, too concerned about a certain unchecked activism and the routine and structure of life that is strangling and consuming us and making us lose our joy in life, the happiness and pleasure of our vocation. In fact, it is just and necessary that we ask ourselves this question: **What is the quality of our life?** Hopefully the many urges and the great amount of work and the multiple structures and things that must be done — hopefully all of these have not made us forget to live life, because people who do not live life generally reflect this reality in their life and in their surroundings and this is often reflected in the form of bitterness, sadness, deceit or melancholy. In conclusion: **living a qualitative life is the primary right and obligation of every human being.**

As Vincentians, we know that the poor do not just want to hear beautiful words or be the beneficiaries of our action. Our *lords and masters*, as our Founder calls them, want to find something more in us. They want to see credible signs and so we must witness to the gospel and be authentic expressions of love and happiness, signs of a lively hope especially in this world of despair. We can say that the poor not only need food and housing, but also need hope and happiness. Therefore, they will believe more because of what they see expressed on our faces, than what they hear with their ears. Saint Vincent tells us: *Facial expressions indicate the dispositions of the heart and, as a rule, reflect what's within...*¹ to proclaim the truths and the maxims of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not with words but by living our lives in conformity with Jesus Christ and giving witness....²

The Quality of Our Vocational Life

Our missionary life ought to result in happiness, optimism and enthusiasm, but our consecrated and missionary life seems to lack this happiness and joy and as a result is unattractive and people are unwilling to join our ranks. This affects not only those persons who desire to enter the Vincentian Family, but also affects those who are already members and who are making a constant effort to rekindle the fire in their beloved Vincentian missionary vocation.

¹ VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents* [CCD], X, 245.

² SV XI, 175; *Conferences to the Missionaries*, Extract from a conference, April 1655, News of FRANÇOIS LE BLANC, a missionary in Scotland.

The lack of a qualitative life gives rise to melancholy, a form of sadness profoundly rooted in the soul that brings about death as a result of the routine and the monotony and mechanics of life. Many times this occurs when life has lost meaning, when there are no objectives in life and life has lost its zest, when life has lost its quality and is no longer lived fully, when life becomes simply a matter of survival. In these cases people are alive physically but dead within, *a form of living death* that, in the words of our Founder, transforms us into *skeletons of missionaries*. Those who were called to give life, to generate and proclaim life to the poor have become **corpses of missionaries** and **not true missionaries**.³

Rather than ask ourselves how are we carrying out the process of evangelization or the mission, we should ask *how are we living life* and *how are we living our vocation*. We should try to live life with meaning and with zest. Recently there has been a focus on the vocational crisis and despite this reality we remain calm because we say that everyone is experiencing the same reality. But the fact is there are no vocations. There is a crisis in the decrease in "quantity," a reduction in numbers. We are pained when we read the statistics of the Congregation and see reflected there a decrease in new members and also see "many missionaries in special situations." Without a doubt there is a **crisis of quantity with regard to vocations** in the Church as well as in our Congregation, but there is also another crisis that is more frightening to confront, a crisis that can be as terrible as the crisis of quantity and here I refer to the **crisis of quality**. There is a **qualitative decrease in living our lives**. What kind of witness do we give in the Church and in the world when we lack this quality of life, when we are steeped in sadness and depression? What quality of joyful love do we give to the poor or to our confreres?

It is very probable that we ourselves are the cause of our own ill state, the cause of this lack of a qualitative life. We are all responsible for the quality of life of all the members but the primary responsibility for one's own quality of human and evangelical life lies with ourselves, the most interested and primary beneficiary. Therefore, today each missionary ought to care for his own quality of life.

³ SV XI, 412, 17: Conferences to the Missionaries, Extracts from two conferences, numbers 170 and 9. *The priests of the Mission who formerly restored the dead to life, will no longer have anything but the name and appearance of what they once were. They will be only corpses of, and not true, missionaries; they will be corpses of Saint Lazarus and not Lazarus risen from the dead, and still less men who raise others to life* (SV XI, 17; Conferences to the Missionaries, Extract from a Conference, *On Retreats*, (undated).

We have to know how to differentiate between the quality of life in a well-ordered society and the quality of life as expressed in the gospel. The latter one obviously refers to us and involves us in the cultivation of meaning in our life. The ultimate ideal and goal of the quality of gospel life is happiness, total blessedness, and the search for meaning in our vocation. This means that we live this present life with meaning and vitality, without being obsessively dependent on social recognition or apostolic, academic or pastoral achievements.

To live a qualitative life we must live the theological experience, the experience of FAITH WHICH IS THE TRUE SOURCE of life that gives MEANING, DETERMINATION, AND VITALITY to our life. We should not try to be more pious or devout but rather we should strive to be people of greater faith whose hearts are attached to the plan of life as presented in the gospel. We should strive to live profoundly the gospel with LOVE and JOY.

Our faces, our hearts and our lives have lost this joy and happiness and meaning in life. We do not seek refuge in the Lord or in his joy and love but in work, activity and schedules, in our rooms, in our mechanical doing of things and we wait for vocations. We are called to recuperate this quality of interior and exterior life, a quality of life that ought to help us to live our vocation, our community life and our apostolic life in a better way. We look for that quality of evangelical life which places us in the human state that God desires for us.

Furthermore, we have to remember that **our vocation is more than a profession**. We are continually called to follow Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor. We are not simply ecclesiastical functionaries who serve the poor. Therefore there is a difference between the quality of life as seen from the perspective of professional demands and the quality of life as seen from the perspective of our vocation.

In our being as Vincentians, the quality of life ought to be related more with vocational happiness than with professional success, even though it must be said that this professional service or professional competency is not opposed to our vocation. We, however, must be mindful of the fact that we run the risk of substituting one for the other or confusing both of these realities. All of this ought to lead us to an examination of our vocational life. Even though everything seems to be functioning well, at least externally, and everything seems to be renewed, revised and actualized and we and the institution are functioning well, yet as we look at our hearts we realize that our sense of purpose, our zeal and our vitality have been weakened. Thus we feel the quality of our life is not growing and that we have lost our fondness for the newness and fidelity in following Christ.

The Quality of Our Community Life

*Community life has been a special characteristic of the Congregation and its usual way of living from its very beginning*⁴ — this is also a determining factor in the quality of life of the missionaries and a determining factor on the human and evangelical level. To have a qualitative life we need a healthy and sane community, living together as dear friends, a communication that frees us from our loneliness and individualism, a community that gives a witness of love to the poor.

We must humbly recognize that many of our problems, doubts, and crises are the result of an inadequate qualitative community life. We forget the call of our Constitutions *to a wholehearted spirit of renewal*⁵ of our community life. At times we become stagnated and unable to be *a sign to the world of the newness of evangelical life*⁶ and unable to be that sign to the poor, our lords and masters.

We cannot wait for the quality of life to be fixed by a decree or by the visit of a superior. We cannot sit down and passively wait, with our arms crossed, for a better quality of life to happen. When community life is destroyed, we are destroying ourselves and our Vincentian vocation because we have been called by the Lord to live in community in order to make present the Vincentian ideal of following Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor. To accomplish this we not only need to proclaim the Word, but above all we also need to give witness to our love.

We have to work in solidarity in order to better the quality of our community life. Despite our fragility, limitations, unfaithfulness and failures, we have to struggle with these forces in order to rebuild and raise up our community life, which is one of the fundamental bases of our vocation.

Together with work and human effort we must be able to express compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, tolerance, education, dialogue and fraternal correction. We must also be mindful of the spiritual power, the theological dimension and ask the Lord for the grace to live as dear friends. Our Founder points out that we ought to pray frequently in order to achieve this quality of life in regard to our community life. This means that we better the quality of our fraternal love so that we not only radiate this love outside the community house toward the poor, but also radiate this love inside our houses, toward our family.

⁴ Constitution 21.

⁵ Constitution 19.

⁶ Constitution 24.

I beseech you, Gentlemen, to desire this frequently before God and to desire it for one another, so that all Missionaries may ever love one another. Let us rejoice that we do so now, and pray God not to suffer us ever to relax in the practice of this brotherly love.⁷

We should not attempt to reduce this invitation to personal prayer or common prayer, which generally is limited to the recitation of the psalms and other prayers in common. It is more than this, more than simply reciting prayers. Also this invitation does not mean that we talk about **spiritual or mystical themes**. Saint Vincent gave a more profound and demanding invitation. We are invited to cultivate this **theological dimension of community**, this dimension of faith that is a fundamental and indispensable requisite when speaking about the quality of life as it applies to our community life and the living of our vocation as missionaries. When this theological foundation is lacking, it becomes difficult to maintain a good quality of evangelical life no matter how much effort we exert with group dynamics, communication techniques, or meetings and gatherings that deal with the theme of community. If this theological foundation is lacking then that which is essential is lacking.

The missionary community that consecrates its whole life to the mission ought to maintain those conditions that enable the cultivation of a qualitative evangelical life and a lively theological dimension. The key to all of this, the decisive step, is the love that characterizes our fraternal relationships. Our Father, Saint Vincent, tells us that this is the practice of fraternal love. This love is what we need in order to live with meaning and vitality, in order to live fully and in order to live a qualitative life. We cannot think that our living together as a gospel community means simply abiding by schedules or certain non-aggression pacts. It does not mean that no one disturbs anyone because everyone is outside the community house and when they are inside, each person is in his own room (which leads to the possibility of isolation). This type of fraternal community would be a minimum, a poverty in community living and not the ideal and therefore would not help us to develop a better qualitative community life.

The key to the theological foundation of our community life is revealed in our Constitutions with great precision. They invite us to see the Blessed Trinity as the **foundation and the principle** of our fraternal life. *The Trinity is the ultimate source of our action and life⁸* and provides us with light so that *the mystery of the Trinity is*

⁷ SV XII, 266; Conferences to the Missionaries, *On Charity*, 30 May 1659.

⁸ Cf., Constitution 20.

our only theological support. Without this solid foundation and without the desire for a continual renewal of our community life, the winds and storms will come and our community houses and life, sustained by human effort and schedules and diagrams, might very well collapse.

The Quality of Our Missionary Life

Our Constitutions state in a very beautiful way who we are: *evangelizing is to be considered its own grace and vocation, and expresses its deepest identity.*⁹

The mission forms the essential part of our Vincentian vocation. Our life without the mission is an empty life, a sad and unhappy life and as a result, a life that lacks meaning and a life that leads to depression because, for a missionary, life without fulfilling the mission would be a life of failure. Our Father, Saint Vincent, tells us that handing ourselves over to the mission is our happiness and our blessing: ***Oh! what a happiness to be a missionary! How happy I am to be of this number.***¹⁰ When our missionary life or our mission is weakened then the quality of life of the members is also weakened and dies.

One of the most serious problems in our missionary life, and a problem that affects the quality of our life, is to confuse our missionary life with the multiplicity of commitments, tasks, and other personal and apostolic activities. We call this **activism** and at times we attempt to measure our work and our apostolate by the number of activities or by professional success and efficiency or by the recognition and applause of others.

Another idea that is key to achieving this quality of vocational and missionary life is to have the courage, the boldness and the wisdom to reorganize our ministries. Saint Vincent tells us that in our missionary work it is necessary to know how to reorganize our time in service of the poor in such a way that we are distinguished by our prudence and especially by our apostolic zeal which ought to be prudent.¹¹ May our pastoral commitments always be mindful of this reality and enable us to question our ministry. Without this perspective we will become tired, weary, and can burn out, which means that we are tired by everything and everyone.

An excessive number of activities and other matters, which we are often called to do and that we also look for, can lead us to an

⁹ Constitution 10.

¹⁰ CCD II, 372.

¹¹ Cf., CCD X, 539.

unfocused zeal, an activism, a life filled with many things to do, but in the end a life that is empty. We become workaholics and this does not mean that we are good missionaries. This undisciplined and excessive enthusiasm [zeal] is not always supported by authentic gospel motives and when we lack this motivation it can be difficult for our apostolic ministry to contribute to a more qualitative life.

In some cases excessive activism can be a fleeing from some reality, a fleeing from one's self, from an interior life or an escape from community. At times we have had the experience of being light on the street and darkness in our community houses. Also an excessive number of things to do can lead to a breakdown in our spiritual life or in our community relationships, including a breakdown in our missionary ministry that weakens the quality of our life. Our Father, Vincent, warned us about the evil that **undisciplined enthusiasm** [zeal] can cause in our vocation:

In the same way, all should be on their guard against two further vices, from opposite extremes, both militating against the whole purpose of the Mission. They are all the more dangerous because it is not immediately apparent that they are vices, as they insidiously assume so different an appearance that they are often taken to be real virtues. This pair are laziness and undisciplined enthusiasm... [Undisciplined enthusiasm], masking our self-love or anger, impels us to act harshly towards both sinners and ourselves, and to take on more work than we can manage, even against obedience, resulting in damage to physical and mental health, involving us later in a frantic search for cures, so that we end up sluggish and sensual.¹²

It is always healthy to dialogue with the Lord, to dialogue in community and to discern the profound motivations of our commitment as missionaries. This enables us to examine whether our motivation is mistaken or not, if we suffer from undisciplined enthusiasm [zeal] or the temptation of selfishness or some compulsive obsession for personal success — all of which can, in time, become a direct attack on the quality of our missionary life. For this reason the quality of our human and evangelical life needs powerful times of prayer and spiritual exercises so that our apostolic ministry does not lose its theological dimension. The ancient monks in the desert referred to this when they spoke about *entering into our inner cell*. Saint Vincent invites us *to be apostles in the countryside and Carthusians in our houses*. A qualitative life implies an inner peace, a fundamental ability to be focused, a joy in being, a joy in

¹² *Common Rules*, Chapter XII, 11.

life, a joy in our identity and a joy in the ordinary events of our life. In other words, this involves recuperating a way of living among ourselves. If we do not do this, we are allowing our life and our environment to deteriorate. Perhaps we will have silence but it will be an empty silence and there will be no communication with ourselves, God and others. This illness can lead to depression and a lack of meaning and vitality in our life. In summary, if we lack this contemplative and prayerful dimension, this ability to look at our interior life and be Carthusians in our houses, the ability to live with ourselves, with our truth, and reality, we cannot achieve a qualitative missionary life that is so necessary.

The Task is in Our Hands

It is necessary to make every effort to achieve this quality of life in the Congregation of the Mission and to obtain this we need the collaboration of all its members. This is not something that is simply the task of superiors, who are called to animate the community and care for the quality of life in the community and the quality of life of each member. No one can distance himself from this mission and all are needed in order to build new communities and new missionaries. We all ought to feel responsible for one another.

The principal subject of this task is each missionary. Each one of us ought to feel responsible to better the quality of our life. Using the language of Saint Vincent when he wrote to a superior in Sedan in 1644 and spoke about working for one's own perfection in one's vocation: *Here, Monsieur, are the things that concern your vocation and to which alone you should apply yourself: (1) your own perfection; (2) that of your family [community].*¹³

In the first articles of our Common Rules and our present Constitutions, we are called to seek perfection in our vocation because there will be no true missionary work in the new evangelization of the Church unless we ourselves are renewed, new men, new missionaries and unless we are able to better the quality of our vocational, community, and missionary life. This is the search for perfection in our vocation.

A static, mechanical, insipid missionary life, a missionary life that lacks vision and joy and dynamism does not help us to be effective evangelizers of the poor. This is the call of our founder when he speaks to us about going to minister to the poor, but *with a love that is always new, always renewed*. He is not only speaking

¹³ CCD II, 495.

about a love that is large in quantity: *Therefore let us go forth and be concerned about this new love in our ministry with the poor.*¹⁴

This new love, this renewed vocation and qualitative life in our being and doing is not some form of utopia. It can become a reality if we are able to commit ourselves to living our Constitutions and Statutes. Saint Vincent has exhorted us to love these documents, to study them and fulfill them because they provide us with the necessary light that enables us to walk along the path of new love, renewed in our ministry with the poor. They not only point out the path that we must travel but also point out how we must travel. In the Constitutions and the Statutes we find the fundamentals, the discipline and the balance for our vocation that enable us to be true contemplatives in action and that also enable us to obtain a better qualitative vocational, community and missionary life and ultimately enable us to be effective ministers of the Good News that is proclaimed to the poor.

This new love and this qualitative renewed vocational life will become a reality in our lives when we dare to project this in clear, bold and creative commitments, making these commitments in appropriate ways so that our words are not carried away by the wind. For this reason we see that our Provincial Norms, our *Ratio Formationis*, our plans for Ongoing Formation, our Provincial Plans and especially the plans of the local communities must seek ways to take on commitments that generate true life, a better qualitative life for each one of their members, committing ourselves to healthy schedules, balancing times for prayers and work, times for Martha and Mary, times for rest and recreation, respecting personal and community time, trying to create in our communities an atmosphere of family and not one of an office or a storeroom. We must avoid the temptation to seek for things outside the community and then take refuge in our rooms. The culture that surrounds the table and meals is not simply a time to satisfy ourselves, but is also a time to gather together with our brothers and share our life and ministry. In this way we, as individuals and as a community, attempt to seek a more qualitative life in order to have a regimen of healthy life that enables us to give a new and renewed love to the poor.

This new and renewed love, this more qualitative vocational Vincentian lifestyle will be possible if we radically and profoundly live out the following of Jesus Christ, servant of the poor. If we lose the strength, the enthusiasm, and the vision of this following of Christ then our vocational life will qualitatively decrease and

¹⁴ SV XI, 393; Conferences to the Missionaries, Extract from a Conference, *On the Love of the Poor*, January 1657.

diminish. This call to live a qualitative missionary life invites us to move to the center of our lives, to the place where we make decision, because we are unable to grow or become better without a clear process of conversion of our hearts, a process that moves from recognizing our own crises to a desire for a profound transformation of our heart, a desire to evangelize ourselves so that we are born anew. We will achieve this to the degree that we open ourselves to the Spirit of God and become converted into living missionaries and are no longer merely corpses of missionaries.

(CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M., translator)

Option for the Whole Life

by José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M.

Minister General O.F.M.

Presentation

The number of male and female religious is decreasing and aging. The prognostics do not seem better in the near future. Rather, one may expect the number of consecrated people to continue decreasing and their age to continue becoming higher.

This double tendency is caused not only by the small number of young people that opt for religious or consecrated life, but also by those who leave during initial or "guided" formation and during the first years of ongoing or "autonomous" formation, which follows solemn profession or priestly ordination. That which today afflicts many institutes is not so much a crisis of vocations but a crisis of the vocation. It is not so much a problem of "entries," but rather a problem of perseverance.

Whether we like it or not, reality shows that solemn profession or priestly ordination is no longer seen, by many persons, as an option for the whole life, as a definitive and irrevocable option, or at least, in many cases, it is not seen as such.

What is happening? Why do many religious leave some time — in some cases only a few months — after having pronounced solemn vows or after having received priestly ordination? Is there any sense in continuing to speak about an irrevocable option, about an option for the whole life?

To answer this question or other similar questions, I think it is necessary to start with drawing a profile of our young religious, within the context of our society today and, more concretely, within the framework of the world of the youth. I will try to indicate the principal tasks, which present themselves in vocational pastoral work and in initial formation.

1. A Few Characteristics of Our Time

The first characteristic which comes to the foreground is that we find ourselves in **a world in transformation**. It is a matter of a historical transformation, which brings with itself the passage from modernity to post-modernity or to a late modernity. We live at a

moment that is characterised by unthought-of cultural changes, of speed in social and radical cultural processes. New cultures and subcultures, new symbols, new lifestyles and new values follow each other with a dizzy velocity. The "certainties" and interpretative global schemes, which characterised the Modern Era, have gone toward complexity, toward plurality, which characterises the Post-Modern Era or the Age of Late Modernity.

This results in much disorientation, uncertainties, insecurities, and all that together leads toward a strong disillusion before all existential demands which are considered useless.

Our time is also a time of commerce. Everything is measured and has its value of utility and of what it will render, even persons. These, in terms of commerce, are worth as much as they produce and they are a value to me in as far as they are useful to me.

We also live at a time which we can define as a time of "zapping," which brings with it an attitude of not accepting long-term tasks, of passing from one experience to another, without deepening any of them.

In such a world, in which everything has been made easy, there is no place for sacrifice, nor for renouncing, nor for similar values. This results in a superficial mentality and a skin-deep sensibility, which search for immediate satisfaction and avoid all that demands constancy, abnegation and patience.

Finally it is worth the trouble to indicate that the world in which we happen to live is dominated by neo-individualism and a "culture of subjectivism" which leads to a **lack of profound communication**.

2. Our Young People

It is very difficult to present a complete profile of the young people of today. I am convinced that young people do not exist, **although the young person** does; that "**youth**" is not an anthropological constant, but depends on society and, definitely, on each young person in particular. It is exactly because of that that it is necessary to begin with the affirmation that **the world of the young is very plural**.

This juvenile world is in particular conditioned by:

- the "culture of subjectivism,"
- the "culture of part-time,"
- the "culture of scepticism,"
- the "culture of temporality."

In direct relation with the last constant, it is worth indicating another constant and that is the distanced implication of our young

people with regard to the problems, which they say occupy them, and to the causes which they say they defend. There seems to be **"a hiatus, a lack, between final values and instrumental values."** In many of our young people there is a great lack of values such as effort, self-responsibility, commitment, etc. The **"light culture"** seems to dominate. **Another characteristic** of the world of today's young, which is sufficiently generalised, is the fact that for many of the young the concept of limit does not exist. The only limit which they accept is that imposed by how much their own body can bear (tolerance, solidity, resistance, strength).

Other constants which influence and condition, more or less, the world of the young are:

- The family, from which they come, is characterised, in many cases, by: the defence of a kind of **axiological neutrality**, according to which each must choose that which seems to be better, and by the **lack of a prolonged communication** with a certain deepness and serenity. This can explain, at least partly, so many attitudes of our young people.
- Another constant of our young people is the fact that **they live happily vested in everyday life**. Many are those who confess that they are happy with what they do.

Besides these young people, we must indicate also many others who are characterised by a great capacity for generous and altruistic commitment and by a great capacity for enthusiasm and fidelity. They are young people with a strong desire of "leading an in-depth life," dedicating themselves **"full-time"** to God and others. They are young people involved in the struggle for justice and solidarity with the poor, and very alert to "provocations," which come from the poor and margined.

3. Our Young Religious

Our young religious form a part, in the fullest sense, of the world of their contemporaries, of that generation, which is called "Generation X," which many define as a fragmented generation, secularised, unstable, not very motivated and without a solid religious formation.

The majority of our young religious do not come from exclusively or preferably "protected" environments. In the enormous majority they have the characteristic traits of contemporaneous youth, particularly: the desire for self-realisation, the value of "authenticity" (to be oneself), the exigency of controlling and reversing their own decisions, a certain uncertainty with regard to the options to make, a great emotional fragility, difficulty at the

moment of considering certain fundamental demands from the point of an existential view, fear to commit themselves definitively, a good dose of individualism, a considerable lack regarding communication and coherence, regarding sacrifice and taking responsibility. Besides these, as is logical, there is no lack of young people who come to religious life, originating from environments, which we can consider as "protected," who have almost no relations with "secularised" cultures.

With regard to the motivations which have brought them to embrace the religious or consecrated life, we cannot discard the fact that there are those who opt to enter religious life and who even arrive at solemn profession or priestly ordination, seeking a refuge or security, or also to "taste" and experiment one more sensation.

It remains clear that once they have tested it and experienced the first sensation, if it was not as satisfying as they had hoped, they will turn back. At this point, however, I believe that it is a matter of justice, once again, to observe that the great majority of our young people arrive well motivated at religious or consecrated life.

Usually our young religious are altruistic and generous persons, occupied with a true dedication in apostolic work. They are young people with a great sensibility for prayer and a great desire for radicalism and authenticity; young people who have received a correct formation in the theology of consecrated life, at least at the conceptual level; who have had experiences of all kinds; who, at least apparently, know well the difficulties of the religious life (since nothing is hidden from them) and who say that they have overcome many crises (crisis of self-image, crisis of realism, affective crises), and from whom we may expect much.

However, we see that, after some time, not a few of them become "victims of a process of secularisation" and "professionalism," which manifests itself in individualism, in a certain air of independence and even in an apparent spiritual colourlessness, which, in many cases, translates itself into the abandon of the vocation.

We know that this period represents "a phase which is critical in itself." We know also that until 40 years of age the person is in a phase of expansion, of progressive construction of his personality. We know all that, but does all that explain the leaving of so many young people during the first years of their insertion into apostolic activity?

I do not believe it is right to throw all the blame on those who, sooner or later, decide to leave. In many cases they are to blame, but we cannot exempt ourselves from the part that concerns us. For that reason it is necessary that we ask ourselves seriously: What are the challenges for the pastoral care of vocations, for initial formation, for ongoing formation and for religious life itself in such a situation?

4. Challenges in the Initial and Ongoing Process

If some time after the profession of “definitive” vows many of our young people decide to leave, it is clear that this places in serious dispute the formative process followed both in the years of initial formation as in the first years of ongoing formation.

4.1. Challenges for the Pastoral Care of Vocations or Vocational Promotion

The acknowledgement of the vocation, the offer and the discernment must be very honest and demanding. We can neither let ourselves be guided by numbers — in many cases this transforms itself into fear because of the lack of vocations, nor by haste — which in many other cases leads to shortening the steps. It is not the numbers that will save or make religious life meaningful in the future. In religious or consecrated life we can never talk about epochs propitious for reduction, neither with regard to the quality, nor with regard to the time. Religious or consecrated life is so closely united to evangelical radicalism that this cannot be changed (to obtain virtue).

On the other hand, attaching oneself to the call, assimilating progressively the sentiments of Christ towards his Father and assuming the spirituality of the Institute, needs time and demands a slow process. I am convinced that, as the announcement of the vocation must be explicit and the offer valid, serious and demanding, the process of discernment too cannot be done by reducing the steps.

To all that has been said, we must add and stress that all steps of the process, to which we are bound, require an adequate witness from all of us who have already embraced the religious or consecrated life. Authenticity of life and a joyful witnessing is asked of all of us in relation to our vocational option, in such a way that we too may say: “Come and see” (John 1:39).

4.2. Challenges for Initial Formation

The first and fundamental challenge, in my point of view, is that of **formation for what is essential**. This includes:

- Formation for making decisions, in a world of undecided persons;
- Formation for assuming a passionate responsibility, in a society where everybody talks about rights and privileges, and only a few are willing to take up the corresponding responsibilities and obligations;

- Formation for taking risks, in a time when people want to assure everything; formation for fraternity and for communion, in a world of solitary people;
- Formation for living with what is sufficient in these days, when some people lack what is necessary and others do not know what to do with their surplus;
- Formation to austerity, in a society of opulence;
- Formation for a constant search for God as the only absolute reason to embrace religious life at a time when the question of what we are and what we do torments our hearts and dries our souls, and when the greater part of our efforts are focused on and used to seek solutions for conserving or developing, but not necessarily recreating, our **"diakonia"**;
- Formation to solitude, in a world of lonely people full of fear and to which we are called to give witness of true communion with all through the vow of chastity.

With regard to **methodology**, considering the plurality of the world of youth in general and of those who opt for religious or consecrated life, it seems evident that initial formation must be personalised. This demands, among many other things, the following:

- **Attention to the person** of each individual and **respect for each one's rhythm of growth**. We have passed from a fundamentally collective awareness, submerged in that of the group, to an awareness in which the individual identity clearly emerges, with the corresponding becoming aware of the person in relation to the group. Keeping in mind this passage, we have already been speaking for some time about the necessity of passing from a passive faith towards a personalised Christianity.

In this same context, we must firmly and decisively stress that the formative process has to be a personalised process. A formative process which is based on and tends toward equal recognition of all is a depersonalised process and, for that reason, is set to produce disasters. A formative process, which really wants to be such, must pay special attention to the uniqueness of each person.

If, in other epochs, we were **"molluscs"** today we must be **"vertebrae,"** which means that today there is not as much support as there was in other times. Today we live **at the mercy of the elements**. Formation cannot be considered as such, if it does not prepare each person to confront this situation.

This attention to the person and the process of growth/formation of each person will require differentiated formative processes:

- **Personalized accompaniment.** Attention to the person demands also a personalised accompaniment and a preferential dedication, even exclusive, on the part of the formators to their priority ministry as vocational and spiritual companions.

Among the demands of accompaniment, it is worth highlighting two. In the first place, accompaniment requires presence, nearness, etc. Accompaniment demands time to listen and share. In the second place, accompaniment and formation must embrace the whole person, but, in my opinion, they must give particular attention to the way of personalisation of faith and to the affective-sexual sphere.

- **Provocative-interpretative methodology**, by means of which the person is not left to himself/herself (subjective pedagogy), nor is simply placed before the norms to which he/she must adapt himself/herself (objective pedagogy), but rather that which helps him/her to discover the presence of God in his/her own way and to respond generously to the provocations coming from the Lord. From his/her own autonomy-authenticity the person tries a way which leads to fullness.

4.3. Challenges for Ongoing Formation During the First Years After Solemn Profession or Priestly Ordination

It is necessary, in the first place, to give our young religious an atmosphere in which they are able to communicate their sentiments.

It is also necessary not to overwork young people. Moved by their vitality and because of the lack of "manpower" they are often given too much work and too great a responsibility. This leads them to fall into intense "**activism**" to the detriment of personal and community life. In such a situation they easily get tired and exhausted. Consequently, it is necessary to confide to them responsibilities adequate to their strengths and possibilities.

Our young people are fragile. They need to be accompanied personally. This accompaniment must be carried out both by the Community and by a specific companion. The community accompanies if it is truly formative; that is, if it is a community in which the members feel themselves to be in ongoing formation and constant discernment; if it is close to the young person; if the "**doing**" of its members does not overshadow their "**being**"; if its members bring the ideal nearer to their daily life, avoiding apathy, becoming bourgeois, etc. But the accompaniment of the community is not sufficient, it is necessary that a **member** feels himself/herself directly responsible for the accompaniment of these young members, helping them "to live fully the love and enthusiasm of their youth for

Christ." The ideal would be that he/she be the superior of the community where these young members are, but if he/she is not prepared for this, the Provincial Superior must provide another member to assume this responsibility. It is the responsibility of the **companion** to:

- maintain a periodical dialogue with the member or members during these first years of discernment in pastoral activity;
- help the young members in integrating the essential values of the charism, without falling into pure and simple adaptation;
- be on the alert that they continue to develop the personal life project;
- pay attention that the work they do does not destroy the spirit of prayer and devotion, nor "separate" itself from community life, creating in them individualism, disorientation and dryness;
- assure a healthy balance between availability and personal desires;
- help them to develop projects of ongoing formation and to follow closely their putting this into practice;
- assure that the members of this age group come together periodically for formation or fraternal sharing.

Only with these premises can the young religious continue the progressive discovery of the contents of the religious identity and can a growth in his/her institutional and charismatic integration be guaranteed.

5. Conclusion

At the end of this reflection the fundamental question arises, a question which has guided us from the beginning: In a society like ours, is it possible to make an option for life that is really absolute and irrevocable?

My answer is clearly affirmative, on condition that the following be observed:

- that religious or consecrated life places the centre of its renewal in a renewed experience of God, Three in One, and considers this experience as its fundamental structure. The central nucleus in religious life is to live in God. The future of religious life, therefore, depends on its option for the living God (cf. John 20:17); its erosion on adaptation to post-modernity.

- that the option for the living God, far from closing oneself in a mysticism separated from everything and everybody, leads religious men and women toward a sharing in the Trinitarian dynamism "ad intra" and "ad extra." The participation in this dynamism "ad intra" supposes relations of communion with one another and demands free dedication of oneself, accepting differences, communication without reserve, maternal tenderness, filial docility. On the other hand participating in the Trinitarian dynamism "ad extra" supposes living critically and prophetically in this "information society," placing the human person above the Sabbath (in the first place) and personal dialogue above anonymity and diverse forms of solitude.
- that there is a clear decision to prefer the quality of life of the community to the number of its members and its activities.
- that in the pastoral care of vocations or vocational promotion, religious life will be presented in all its evangelical radicalism and that a discernment is made in consonance with these demands.
- that during initial formation a personalised accompaniment will be assured and that the level of the demands will not be lowered in all that is considered essential in religious life.
- that there be continuity and coherence among vocational promotion, initial formation and ongoing formation.
- that during the first years after solemn profession personalised accompaniment continue.

Certainly, even by assuring all this, abandonment of the religious life will continue, but I think that these will diminish in relation to those which occur today or, at least, there will be less responsibility on our part.

A lovely oriental proverb says: "The eye sees only sand, but the enlightened heart can perceive the end of the desert and fertile land." Let us look with our heart. Perhaps we will be able to see what others do not see and help others to see that which otherwise they might never succeed in seeing.

(VICTOR BIELER, C.M., translator)

The Phenomenon of Departure from the Congregation from a Psychological Point of View: Intrapsychic Dynamics

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Introduction

Vocation to the religious life is in itself a mystery of participation in the mission of Christ. Precisely because it is a mystery, sometimes it is difficult, in a specific individual case, to understand exactly how it begins and where it must terminate. But like every other mystery, we can understand something about it.

In recent years, many congregations, as well as ours, have witnessed a good number of premature departures for various motives and reasons. The effect sometimes can be contagious in the community and injurious or liberating to the individual persons. Thus this phenomenon continuously opens new questions for investigation towards a broader understanding of the possible causes.

In a religious vocation there are two persons involved in the fulfillment of one mission: God and Man. The individual religious is, therefore, invited to be engaged wholly with the divine gift of internal grace which, building on his nature and internal disposition, helps him to be effective in the mission. The central idea that emerges from this consideration is the fact that there is, on the one hand, the grace of God to live the invitation and, on the other hand, a personal disposition through free response.

However, this has a big implication for living the actual vocational experience. For instance, the freedom to live the Vincentian vocation will require a personal and conscious commitment to an understood value. In other words, effectively living it will imply a sufficient understanding of the Christian values as presented by the Congregation of the Mission, a conscious and personal commitment to these values and an understanding of the dynamics that might weaken or destroy the commitment.

So this article will seek to offer, first of all, a brief review of the Vincentian vocation as a religious vocation and the value it presents. Secondly, it will look at the motivational predisposition for entrance into the vocation, and some intrapsychic factors that could affect effectiveness and perseverance.

The Call to Be a Vincentian

Every Vincentian priest or brother has a personal story on how and where he first got the call or the motivation to dedicate himself to the service of the poor. Though varied, the unifying factor about these stories and experiences is that they are not automatic but begin gradually. Events and further experiences continue to inspire and nurture it until eventually a decision is made. Even such a decision is open to further challenges by later experiences.

Just like every other religious vocation, the call to be a Vincentian can be understood as a call to the adventure of faith expressed in the service of the poor in the spirit of St. Vincent. This vocation, therefore, is not an achievement of a status but an insertion into the mystery of service, which is not a final point, but a departure for the actual experience of the vocation.

Looking back at the history of the Congregation of the Mission one of the most painful moments that St. Vincent had to contend with was the gradual departure of so many good men who had started living the experience of serving the poor but could no longer persevere. St. Vincent once said, "I have seen a member of the company, one of the very best among us who is about to leave, without giving me any particular reason."¹ His intention was not, it would seem, to manipulate perseverance and neither did he presume that everyone who was once inclined to the Congregation was always so motivated and had finally found his vocation. In fact, St. Vincent acknowledged that there could be wrong or inconsistent motivations. His reaction to the departure of some members like Chrétien Daisne and Brother Doutrelet² was a good example of his assumption of the possible weak and unrealistic motivation of some members.

But, from the depth of his experience, Vincent would warn that the symptoms before departure included failure to rise early, lack of prayer, and the neglect of the practice of poverty.³ To this end, it is evident that St. Vincent was challenging inconsistent lifestyle here; that is, where one's attitude does not sufficiently sustain the value professed, but gratifies the internal needs of the individual.

¹ SV III, 379.

² SV VII, 354, 379.

³ SV XI, 223.

As we stated earlier everyone has his vocational story, his vocational motivation and his personal ideal in living the call to the religious life and more so the call to be a Vincentian. But the realization of this story or motivation is often mediated by the Church or the Congregation, such that the call to be a Vincentian, which began as a private experience, becomes a call to living the charism that is the identity of the Congregation of the Mission. The five Vincentian virtues — simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal for souls, which make up Vincentian spirituality — are presented as instrumental values which facilitate theocentric self-transcendence and vocational effectiveness.

So apart from the self ideal, which may form the base for a vocational motivation, the institutional ideals/values, like the five virtues, are all the more important for the realization of the end of religious life (union with God). But one wonders: what could make someone be motivated by the Vincentian vocation, but at the same time incapable of living the values associated with being a Vincentian? This question calls us to examine the structural and content dynamics of the human person as important factors to living the vocational life.

The Human Personality: Structure and Content

The human person is one of God's most complex creatures. His complexity renders a single directional view, a reductionist anthropology. But an authentic Christian understanding, which we want to adopt, holds that though human beings are created in the image of God, with the capacity to know and love their creator,⁴ they experience disunity within themselves⁵ as a result of the dynamic interaction between the actual self, ideal self, needs, attitudes and values. That is the basic dialectic of the human person.

We consider the structure of the human person as two ends of one pole. The actual self and the ideal self. The ideal self, because it is the idea the person has of himself and the type of person he wants to be, is prevalently conscious and sometimes illusive. The actual self, which is the actual and everyday life the person is living, is both conscious and unconscious. How many times are we surprised that we did things that we never knew we could do or never were conscious that we did? This seems to be our unconscious or latent self at work. Common feedback in the community tries to make this unconscious, actual self conscious to the person.

⁴ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, 12 (henceforth cited as GS).

⁵ GS 10.

Now within this structure are present the active content which puts the life of the individual person in a dynamic process. This content includes values, attitudes and needs.

Values constitute what one holds as important and wants to attain. They may be religious, political or economic. Whatever they are, what is important is that the values of the person tend to influence the actual self in a very definitive way. Such influence could be self-gratification, in which case it is centered on the person's well being and personal comfort, or it could be self-liberation, which is centered on freeing the person for something outside of himself, for example, living the Vincentian vocation as a gift of oneself or basically to provide a job or means of survival for oneself.

Attitudes are the specific dispositional ways one tends to express what he values or what he needs. Attitude is like an indication of one's conscious or unconscious need or value. The classical definition of attitude holds that "*an attitude is a relatively enduring organization of beliefs concerning an object or situation, which predisposes one to respond in a certain preferential way.*"⁶ Thus attitude would tend to precede behavior or action. Hidden behind every attitude is the need of the individual person. Thus *needs* are innate tendencies to action which derive from a privation in the organism or from the natural potentialities inherent in it, which he tries to actualize.⁷ So all three constitute the internal movement of the individual personality, such that every motivation or decision tends to be remotely conditioned by the antecedent dictates of values, needs and attitudes interacting in the person.

Given this background then, it becomes necessary to understand the phenomenon of painful departures from the Congregation from the psychosocial dynamics perspective. We must understand "*how*" and "*what kind of*" needs, values and attitudes preceded the choice of entrance and sustained or weakened the actual living out of the Vincentian vocation. Therefore two questions emerge as regards the choice and the living of the Vincentian vocation: 1) What structure is the individual using when he is making the choice? What motivates him? 2) How is he motivated; that is, what is preoccupying him and how is the motivation being sustained?

These two questions will form the pivot of our discussion and give a direction toward formulating hypothesis on understanding the phenomenon of departure from our perspective.

⁶ M. ROKEACH, *Belief, Attitude and Values. A theory of Organization and Change*, p. 112.

⁷ L.M. RULLA, *Depth Psychology and Vocation*, Rome, 2003, p. 31.

The Choice to Enter and Be Received into the Company

Every choice is at the cost of a renunciation. The choice to enter the Congrégation of the Mission is a renunciation to being a diocesan priest or brother. But choice in itself is based on a value appraised as good-for-me or good-in-itself. A value appraised as good-in-itself leads to self-transcendence because it is objective, whereas a value appraised as good-for-me guarantees gratification as far as it is good for me. When conditions change and that value does no longer gratify or satisfy my need, it ceases to be a value.

Therefore the decision to enter the Vincentian vocation is assumed to begin with the appraisal of the Vincentian values, in addition to general Christian values, as good-for-me or good-in-themselves. Thus, if it is based on the values as good-in-themselves, the choice to enter the Company becomes the choice to commit oneself to the values presented by the institution and to integrate these ideals as Christian values into one's actual life in the following of Christ.⁸ This in turn will promote vocational effectiveness and perseverance. But if the values are appraised as good-for-me, they maintain their force as long as conditions are favorable to the person.

In this regard, vocational choice requires personal responsibility, which is centered on the individual self-ideal and the institutional vocational-ideal. But to aim at eliminating a conflicting lifestyle, as a Vincentian, the values the person seeks and lives must be considerably in agreement or consistent with the objective value of Christian vocation and the characteristic value of the Vincentian virtues. It is the disparity between these values and personal values that could trigger a vocational crisis in the early or later stages after entrance.

Vocational Crises in the Congregation

A vocational crisis can be experienced at any stage after entrance into the vocational life. Some experience it early, others later. Some people survive the crisis, while others feel destroyed by it. Crisis can be described as a state of conflict, internal or external, which provokes the feeling of meaninglessness and powerlessness. It is the state when personal defenses seem to have broken down and the person becomes somehow disorganized, whether in his relationship with himself, people or his work.

⁸ L.M. RULLA, *Anthropology of Christian Vocation*, Volume 1, Rome, 1986, p. 339 (henceforth cited as ACV).

Vocational crisis, then, is the experience of conflict in the vocational life after entrance. Such conflict can be internal or external. It is internal when it involves the intrapsychic dynamics of the person; that is, the interaction among needs, attitudes and values. It is external when it is provoked by external factors, for example, the community or family system or some social factor or pressure. Most often it is crisis that leads to departure from the Congregation.

Inconsistency

Internal conflict originates from the dialectics of two incompatible internal reactions whose forces, from the functional point of view, are equal; that is, the incompatibility *between needs and values*. Intrapsychic conflict, as regards its effect on the individual person, can be experienced by the individual religious whose needs are in dissonance with vocational values. In this case, living religious life effectively becomes difficult since he will frequently seek to satisfy his needs in an environment that does not facilitate this satisfaction because of the orientation of the institutional values.

Among the many human needs, there are some which give rise to attitudes that might be described as vocationally dissonant; that is to say, they are in conflict with values which are fundamental in a religious vocation.⁹ These needs are aggression, affective dependence, sexual gratification, exhibition and abasement. The more these needs are nurtured, the more they pose a danger to living a religious vocation. So great inconsistency exists when one proclaims the religious value but feeds one or more of these needs by his attitude.

For instance, an individual may proclaim love for the poor as a value or as a motivation for the Vincentian vocation, while actually he desires prestige and self-fulfillment in his everyday, actual life. When this happens the individual resorts to a defensive attitude either by compliance or identification¹⁰ with the religious group, just to keep using the group for his needs. The tragedy occurs when this conflict is unconscious, so that the individual religious does not

⁹ L.M. RULLA - F. IMODA - J. RIDICK, *Psychological Structure and Vocation*, p. 7 (henceforth cited as PSV).

¹⁰ This was discussed by Kelman in connection with attitude change. He defined compliance as the attitude of accepting influence from another person or from a group because he hopes to achieve a favorable reaction from the other. This is done regardless of what his private beliefs may be. Identification is when an individual adopts behavior derived from another person or group because this behavior is associated with a satisfying self-defining relationship to this person or group. Cf. H.C. KELMAN, "Process of Opinion Change," in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1961) Vol. XXV, pp. 62-65.

understand what is going on, even as he suffers and no longer finds meaning in his vocational life.

Sometimes some young men and women may be attracted to religious life in some of our provinces because of the rate of poverty and unemployment. This is not an invalid motivation in the first instance, but these are likely to face internal conflict when they are not able to internalize the Vincentian values in the course of their formative experience. The effect is premature crises and eventual departure when they are confronted with the reality of living the Vincentian life and the vows. At times we observe the phenomenon that some young confreres from developing countries, when given the opportunity to study in the developed — or what sociological literature calls first-world — countries, enter into crises and do not want to return home again. This may be because they have found what they actually sought, in which case there will arise the question of initial mixed motivation, or they become confused by the values that the developed world is presenting to them. Here there is a question of affective immaturity.

When this inconsistency exists, the individual person, instead of finding fulfillment in religious life, constantly experiences conflict and dissatisfaction about almost everything. He expresses his dissatisfaction by seeing that the community is bad and nothing is working, the apostolate is not satisfying, the superior is not caring enough. The litany may be longer and it will be turned against the entire community and everybody else who does not see things as he does. In such situations, he simply awaits an opportunity for departure.

Psychological and Social Inconsistency

Inconsistency could be understood from two perspectives: social and psychological. A *psychological inconsistency* exists when an *unconscious* need is incompatible with proclaimed values and attitudes; for instance, if someone, who has a strong, subconscious need for power and prestige embraces the vow of poverty and the five Vincentian virtues. He is likely to suffer some psychological conflict because of the evident inconsistency between his needs and his values and attitudes.

Social inconsistency exists when a subconscious need is incompatible with vocational values and the attitude obeys the needs more than the values.¹¹ Here we can think of the situation where a confrere has a strong subconscious need for sexual gratification, which is expressed in a consonant attitude of entering into intimate

¹¹ PSV, pp. 11-12, 35.

friendship with a particular girl, forgetting the value and the vow of celibacy and chastity.

The resultant effect of these two kinds of inconsistency is evidently conflict and dissatisfaction. In fact, these contradictions can limit the judgment processes and decision-making of the person, and even hurt his interpersonal relationships and, indirectly, his progress in the spiritual life.¹² These can result in social or missionary blunders and eventual departure.

We have widespread instances in vocational life when people faced psychological and social vocational inconsistency, which resulted in the decision to quit the vocation. Unfortunately, in the vocational life, people can underestimate the obstructive influence of the unconscious. This seems to have a long history in the Church, because the theory of unconscious influence was seen as the politics of modern psychology — whose father, Sigmund Freud, was a celebrated atheist — and was incompatible with Christian belief. This position was evident in the Church's view of man as either almost free and always responsible for his action, such that every action was indexed as sin or virtue; or not free and almost totally driven by unconscious forces in the sense of pathology.

But Vatican II broadened this view and accepted the possible influence of the unconscious in living the vocational life. Thus it declared that, pastorally, sufficient use should be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially psychology and sociology. In this way, the faithful will be brought to purer and more mature ways of living the faith.¹³

There is every indication that the council teaching on the use of human sciences to foster maturity in the Christian vocation considers the Christian response as a total self-giving. From this background, there has been extensive emphasis in post-conciliar documents on integral formation,¹⁴ which pays special attention to consistent vocational integration and to various aspects of development. The aim is to foster personal freedom in response to the Christian vocation. It was this background that provoked research on the

¹² F. MAEURES, "Un Progetto Interdisciplinare di Antropologia Cristiana," extract from *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1987, p. 236.

¹³ GS, 62.

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations, *Vita Consecrata*, 65 and *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 2, 3, 4; Cf. also, Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate (31 May 1983), 45; *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition) 18 July 1983, p. 7; National Conference of United States Catholic Bishops, *The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests*, 24-26.

possible influence of the unconscious on freedom in vocational life.¹⁵ Practical results from this research have indicated that vocational crises and eventual departure do have roots not only in the weakness associated with sin, but may be even more related to an entrenched weakness due to the presence of unconscious inconsistencies as regards apparent good and real good; that is, what is good-for-me and serves my need and what is good-in-itself and serves a universal purpose.

The very presence of these deep-rooted, unconscious inconsistencies tends, with time, to assume an imperial take over and undermine the virtuous practices of the individual¹⁶ — like personal prayer, Eucharist, spiritual reading — that have value for the kingdom and instrumental values — like the vows and the five Vincentian virtues — that are basic to vocation. When these are broken down the person begins to see meaninglessness in the vocation. The worst case is when virtues were not strongly formed in the early years. The unexpected crises thus weaken apostolic effectiveness and the perseverance of the individual. The result will be departure or managing to stay, which is known as *nesting*.

False Expectations

Inconsistency in some way is related to false expectations. People normally attach personal meaning to values, people, institutions and things. The meaning they attach to these things becomes their expectations. There are a lot of expectations people can have about vocational life; for instance, the expectation that it is a perfect community or it is a paid job or a power-class. Unrealistic expectation does not allow for self-transcendence. But expectations based on the self-transcendence option of the *gift of self in the service of the mission* tend to be real and the vocational meaning will revolve around how much of oneself is given instead of how much of one's need is gratified. Sometimes, through realistic expectation, community life can foster growth in theocentric self-transcendent

¹⁵ In his research, Rulla talks about the three dimensions. In the first dimension one is considered as completely free in the sense of effective freedom. He is prevalently conscious and morally responsible for actions at this dimension. Actions therefore tend to sin or virtue. The second dimension mediates between the first and third dimensions. It is the dimension of consciously and unconsciously motivated actions. There is a degree of effective freedom here and there is also limitation. Actions at this dimension tend to real good or apparent good. This is the dimension of the non-culpable error. The third dimension is the dimension that entails opposite poles of normality or pathological illness. Here one is almost without freedom and tends to be driven by unconscious forces (ACV, Vol. 1, p. 193).

¹⁶ ACV, 357.

love based on internalization of the objective values of the Christian vocation and the Congregation.

But unrealistic expectations will seek gratification of personal needs through community life, in which case repeated satisfaction of needs becomes a hindrance instead of a help to vocational life.¹⁷ The frustration of these needs will then result in infantile choices.

In fact, the frustration begins with the *expectations* that people have before and at entrance to the vocational life. People can be so rigid in their expectations, evaluate vocation in a one-directional way and live with too much initial hope, that later there is no hope because of what has happened in community or in their experience.

Affective Immaturity

Affective development involves growing in relation to what one values and holds as important. Affective maturity is a process of self-awareness in relation to an important other. The other could be a value, a person or a promise. Affective maturity is about being in touch with the self and knowing one's inner desires, emotions, impulses, and reactions.

In this regard, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, first of all, presents affective maturity as the result of an education in true and responsible love; secondly, as the capacity to enter into a good and affective *relationship with others*, worthy of esteem and respect such as would be reflected in the relationship between man and woman; and thirdly, as *true friendship* and deep brotherliness which flow from and into a lively and personal love of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

This requires a clear and strong training in freedom, which expresses itself in a convinced and heartfelt obedience to the "truth" of one's own being and to the "meaning" of one's own existence; that is, to the "sincere gift of self" as the way and the fundamental content of an authentic realization of self.¹⁹

Affective immaturity, therefore, is the inability to relate effectively with others outside oneself and inattentiveness to what is happening within oneself. Thus the affectively immature religious runs the risk of living the experience of unending bitterness, discontent and loneliness when struck with some crisis, which could lead to eventual abandonment of the vocation.

¹⁷ ACV, 402.

¹⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, *On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*, 44.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

Social Pressure

Social pressure is another factor that can weaken values. In contemporary society, commitment to higher values seems to be discouraged by the social concept of emancipation. Everything is interpreted within the narrow confines of the self and what gratifies it. People tend to seek pleasure and search for the cash or pleasure-value thing or event.

Therefore, it is not worth dedicating oneself to anything without cash or pleasure-value. This contemporary social concept seems to influence living the vocational life as a gift of oneself. Today the definitions of poverty, obedience and chastity seek adaptation to social demands and contemporary understanding. But social demands tend to deny the possibility of a permanent commitment. Consequently, these new waves assume the form of emotional politics in search of adherents. Unfortunately, religious, who are already weak in the practice of virtue, become vulnerable to the social campaign and gradually lose their balance in the vocational life. Sometimes this campaign presents unrealistic pledges. The first target of this campaign is to weaken the self-transcendent value and direct attention to the pleasure of the natural value. Then it will reach out to the attitude until gradually the individual sinks into confusion. The confusion it provokes is that of thinking that outside the confinement of religious life there is freedom, more happiness and unlimited chances for self-fulfillment. How true this is, is a matter of experience.

Non-Cohesiveness

Cohesiveness is the degree to which members are motivated to remain in the group. It is the attractiveness of a group for its members. It is the condition of members who feel warmth and comfort in the group, feel they belong, value the group and feel that they are valued in turn and unconditionally accepted and supported by the entire group.²⁰

Among other things, the significant emphasis on this definition is the emotional satisfaction of the members of the group, given the nature of the group as a psychological environment. The members of a cohesive group, therefore, tend to behave with the confidence of real belongingness. They consider the task of the group as their task and they value the group. A religious community is like a group and perseverance would be occasioned by the degree of cohesion. When

²⁰ IRVIN D. YALOM, *The Theory and Practice of Group Therapy*, 4th ed., New York, 1995, p. 48.

the community is non-cohesive in terms of making community plans and building a community structure that involve its members, there is a likelihood that perseverance will not be encouraged and a decision to depart would be easy in face of the slightest difficulty. Confreres in crisis often lack the emotional support of the community and so feel lonely and hence become victims of aggression turned against the self.

Conclusion

We have noted, among many things, that religious vocation is first of all a call from God. But because it is directed to man in real life, there are many psychological variables that come to play in effectively living and persevering in it. As we have pointed out, such variables, when not properly integrated, can result in departure. In fact, living and persevering in the religious life seem to be about living the conflict of these variables in relationship to the vocational instrumental values (poverty, chastity, obedience) and the terminal value (union with God). These variables include consistency, realistic expectation, cohesion, affective maturity and personal conviction about the gift of self for service.

Living Evangelical Celibacy in Times of Crisis

by Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.

Editor of "Vincentiana"

There is no doubt that changing attitudes towards sexuality have come about. A strong cultural and ethical transformation, especially in this area of human experience, has taken place in many societies. The attitudes of young people and adults, which are revealed by their sexual conduct, are very permissive. It seems that moral rigorism has become extreme permissiveness; negative, repressive attitudes have turned into subjective and arbitrary life

Very quickly, and in a short period of time, a parallelism has occurred between the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church regarding sexual matters and concrete behavior of men and women, including that of the faithful. Without a doubt this disconnect and distancing is not just a current development. There has always been some distance between theory and practice, between the ideal and the real. However, in society today, the distancing appears more evident, and what is real is strongly calling into question both theory and ideal.

This conditioning and these difficulties incite and influence the conception of *celibacy* which, as articulated by Vatican II, many considered to be something impossible.¹ The words that Father Voillaume would say to the Little Brothers of Jesus in the 1950s continue to ring true today: "Today more than ever, it is difficult for a religious to observe chastity [...] from the moment one is called to live the commitment to be chaste in a world where nobody recognizes or values it. Of all the people who surround us, very few of them believe that chastity is possible."²

¹ PAUL VI, Conciliar Decree, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965), 16.

² Taken from AMADEO CENCINI, *Por amor, con amor, en amor*, Sociedad Editorial Atenas, Madrid, 1996, 137-138.

The truth about human sexuality

But is everything difficult, ambiguous, and conditional? Is it all negative and detrimental? Our objective, as stated in the beginning, is to analyze the present socio-cultural context and expressly refer to the difficulties that are a part of the attempt to live a serene and joyful lifestyle as a celibate. Perhaps the first important phenomenon that has unleashed and that has accompanied the changes produced in sexual behavior has been the reflection on the same human sexuality and on its normative foundations. It is not just about simple "reforms." To comprehend human sexuality we find ourselves with a true "revolutionary transformation."³ In the face of taboos or past fears, a new attitude has developed that seeks to substitute truth for fear with regards to sexuality.

Scientific studies, especially the Human Sciences, have dissipated many prejudices and negative conceptions about human sexuality and have helped to better comprehend its value and its richness. The basis of comprehending sexuality in relation to the human person is that it forms an integral part of one's personality and of his or her educative process. As Paul Ricoeur has expressed, it is our sexuality that discovers the mystery of the person and, in doing so, the person manifests the mystery of his or her sexuality. Reflections about the sexual condition of the human being reveal that sexuality is a rich and complex reality, which cannot be reduced to biology, but rather that pervades, embarks, and affects the whole human being, and is, furthermore, a reality in which the evolutionary dynamism of the person takes part. Far from being once and forever the same in the individual, one's sexuality grows and progressively develops in evolutionary stages. It is through one's sexuality that one opens him or herself up to others, is capable of relationship and communication, of love and of transmitting life. The integral significance, the relational, communicative, loving dimension, the evolutionary character, together with a revaluation of the body, the deep sense of equality and complementarity of the sexes, a positive vision of pleasure, express perhaps the values that, in a special way, enhance the present sexual culture.

In regard to celibacy, this new culture provides interesting aspects which can be of benefit to those committed to religious life. Here I simply cite some examples to make my point clearer: the fall

³ Cf., CARTER T. HEYWARD, "Nota sobre la fundamentación histórica, más allá del esencialismo sexual," in COLLECTION, *La sexualidad y lo sagrado*, Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao, 1996, 50; COSMO PUERTO PASCUAL, "Las tendencias antropológicas de la sexualidad ante las puertas del nuevo milenio," in COLLECTION, *Revisión de la comprensión cristiana de la sexualidad*, Nueva Utopía, 1997, 19-24.

of repressive taboos, the surmounting of a negative conception of chastity (identified simply as negation, continence, and renouncement), the rediscovery of the body, the desire to progress in affective maturity, more intimate relationships arrived at through more personal communication, the positive attitude of friendship, and the search for more loving, tender, and caring expressions. To live such values in the celibate life constitutes an authentic challenge of courage that understands chastity as "the capacity of guiding the sexual instinct to the service of love and of integrating it in the development of the person."⁴

Time of Crisis

To assimilate it and to live celibacy joyfully as a celibate on the threshold of the 21st century, we must, in a critical way, authentically discern our place in this era of change, of cultural crisis, of economic instability, and political uncertainty. To describe the present situation of society, sociologists speak of social change. Perhaps no changes have been more decisive than those which arose during the Industrial Revolution. It is there, as Moser points out, where we find the axis of the shift from a closed society to an open one.⁵ The industrial society, more than any post-industrial phase, evolves into a pluralistic society, and reflects the capitalist-liberal system and advances towards a secularism in which religion and all that it implies and stands for is reduced to a private matter. All of this is manifested and carries with it multiple implications in the area of sexuality.

Sexual liberation and the sexual revolution have brought with them, above all, a great pluralism as to the cultural interpretation of sexuality in regards to behavior. Here we can think of attitudes that are disclosed about sexual relations in adolescents, homosexuality, and birth control. Pluralism frequently produces perplexity. It is not easy to unweave oneself from the "clear and distinct ideas" of the past, nor move from such certitudes to uncertainty. Paul VI, recognizing this cultural pluralism, honestly affirmed that in the face of such a variety of situations "it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity."⁶ Without even applying his words to the questions around sexuality, they are a call to listen to the voice that is heard in the midst of perplexity, to

⁴ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educational Guidance in Human Love* (1983), 18.

⁵ Cf., ANTONIO MOSER, "Sexualidad," in *Mysterium Liberationis*, UCA, El Salvador, 1993, 110.

⁶ PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), 4.

recognize pluralism, and to know how to live with uncertainty and ambiguity.

Within the framework of pluralism the prevailing vision which drives the neo-capitalism liberal is called "sexual liberation." If in the beginning it was possible to see that it was really liberation from repressive situations, it no longer can be seen as such in that it has generated a devaluation similar to that of economics: always wanting to have more money but becoming impoverished, or having more pleasure but not finding true happiness.⁷ Furthermore, the devaluation of sexuality is accompanied by a devaluation of true liberty. Disapproving of responsibility, freedom becomes arbitrary and a self-deception; and in this way sexuality is separated from the person, objectified, and converted into an object of mass consumption.

Along with this liberal vision, it is not surprising that the social dimension of human sexuality gets lost. Today's sexual culture is marked by individualism: "this is mine," "my personal life is nobody's business." For many, individualism constitutes one of the great achievements of modern civilization: it guarantees people the right to choose their own rules of life, to make decisions conscious of the convictions and values they wish to adopt, and to configure their lives from among a wide variety of choices. The dignity of the person and exercise of his or her rights is defended. However, at the same time, individualism, to put myself at the center of my being, narrows our lives, impoverishes meaning, and tends to cause us to lose interest in others. But, above all, in the area of sexuality it leads to relativism, narcissism, and permissiveness, that are reflected in culture today.

Finally, in this brief description of the socio-cultural context in which we live as consecrated celibates, the phenomenon of secularism takes on particular relevance. According to Paul VI, secularism is "the characteristic mark" of the contemporary world and represents "a concept of the world according to which the latter is self-explanatory, without any need for recourse to God."⁸

The influence of lay, secular culture affects not only the social models of sexuality, but also has repercussions on consecrated life, and presents extreme difficulties for living the gift of celibacy for the Kingdom.

⁷ Cf., JOSÉ IGNACIO GONZÁLEZ FAUS, *Sexo, verdades y discurso eclesialístico*, Sal Térrea, Santander, 1994, 17-19.

⁸ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), 55.

From Humanization to Moral Anonymity

The new cultural tendencies regarding sexuality were inherited from anthropocentrism and the vindication of liberty which modernity proposes. From this cultural climate, sex has been vindicated, exhibited, and magnified. But has it been humanized? When it is thought that "to make love" is a good in itself, and even better the more often it happens, in whatever way possible or imaginable, between the greatest number of persons, and for the longest possible amount of time,⁹ liberty and sexuality lose their human content, are devalued and dehumanized, and thus lose their true quality. In the 70s, Paul Ricoeur warned of the dehumanization of genital sex, empty of human content. Sex is depersonalized and becomes banal and made insignificant, or rather, it loses meaning and the human message of the one who is its bearer.¹⁰ Today's prevailing culture makes human sexuality banal by uniting it only to the body and egoistic pleasure, interpreting it and living it in a reductive manner, simply as a product of consumption, as that which has no other meaning than that of a pleasing and gratifying exercise. In this way, the absolutizing of it and the pretension of it as liberating without limits lead to and result in its dehumanization.¹¹

Within this superficial, depersonalized, and hedonistic climate, there is a tendency to distance sexuality from any moral objective norm.¹² It is a fact that the sexual liberation movements have transformed traditional sexual morals from top to bottom. In reality, socially it has gotten to the point that sex and morals have been disassociated, and sex-sin has been replaced with sex-pleasure. In place of the moral face of the past, sex in society today presents a functional definition, erotic and psychological, which no longer must be observed, repressed, or sublimated; on the contrary, it should be expressed without limitations, brakes, or taboos. Above all, there exists no homogeneous ethic: *"The individualistic process has undermined any consensus about dignity or indignity, normal or pathologic, the absolutism of good and bad has given way to sexual indulgence of the masses."*¹³ Because of this, all attitudes towards sexuality have equal value and validity, anything can be chosen,

⁹ Cf., DAVID COOPER, *La muerte de la familia*, Ariel, Barcelona, 1984, 55.

¹⁰ PAUL RICOEUR, "La merveille, l'errante, l'énigme," in *Esprit*, n. 11 (1960), 1665-1666.

¹¹ Cf., JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiari Consortio* (1981), 37; Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), 44.

¹² Cf., JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (1996), 88.

¹³ GILLES LIPOVETSKY, *El crepúsculo del deber. La ética incolora de los nuevos tiempos democráticos*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 1994, 61.

nothing should be repressed or obligatory. What in the past was a moral obligation is now nothing more than one possible individual election. The moral obligation is limited to the desire of not depending on anyone else or to protecting one's self from the risks of AIDS.

From this perspective of moral anomaly there is a tendency to legitimize daily behavior, to separate sex from love, love from fidelity, sexuality from procreation, a separation that produces multiple faces because love and fidelity make sacred the quality of life and relationships; they not only express the vocation of the person, but also the space which is neither manipulated or betrayed.

Finally, I want to allude to a phenomenon also generated by today's social context, and especially important to the living of celibate chastity. It has its roots in the fall of truth, in that diffuse nihilism which post-modernity proclaimed and called "weak thinking," in the disenchantment and collapse of hope. Together with some effects, frequently pointed out, as in the obscuring of great values or of ethical confusion, there are others which are just becoming noticed, for example, the banalization of beauty or the crisis of a sense of the aesthetic. That beauty is far from present culture and from fragmented technological knowing, and that aesthetic value is rendered defenseless and runs the risk of losing its spiritual value and its connection to what is good and true, is something that today is being manifested on many fronts.

Amadeo Cencini assures that, in our society, the celibate himself is in crisis, unable to unify beauty and celibacy, a crisis in which he is unable to experience the truth and conviction that to surrender one's self to God through virginity is not only holy and functional in the realization of ministry, but also "beautiful." This progressively diminishes the value and the desire of seeking the fullness and pleasure of life as the center of the celibate experience. To live virginity unrelated to beauty would be to deform and betray it.¹⁴ It would be to live celibacy simply as a moral or ascetic obligation. It is true that celibacy implies commitment and renunciation, obligation and self-control. But if it does not express a charismatic dimension, symbolic and aesthetic, if it does not reach the point of being esteemed as the precious pearl that one finds in a field, then it is probable that one will not give testimony of the true, authentic celibate value.

All of these phenomena make up the atmosphere of the cultural context of today. In the midst of all this we live celibacy; and, in such

¹⁴ Cf. AMADEO CENCINI, *op. cit.*, 152-158.

a way, we see ourselves and, at times, ask ourselves if it is all worth it and if what we do really gives testimony to the men and women of the world.

Chosen for Loving Service

The present crisis of celibacy manifests itself not only in the fact that, sociologically, it may no longer be considered as valuable and acceptable, of having to live it in an unfavorable climate or one in which sexuality is so highly exalted; but also in the knowledge of numerous priests and religious who have renounced their celibate commitment, the publicity given to sexual scandals by people consecrated to God, as well as the polemic about linking celibacy with priestly ministry. All of this is behind the present crisis and calls into question a sense of meaning and stimulates both revision and renovation.

The apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, points out a few valuable tracks from the evangelical counsels for living out virginity that, in many ways, respond to our lines of questioning. John Paul II says: "In virginity and in celibacy, chastity retains its original meaning, that is, of human sexuality lived as a genuine sign of and precious service to the love of communion and gift of self to others.... The synod would like to see celibacy presented and explained in the fullness of its biblical, theological and spiritual richness, as a precious gift given by God to his Church and as a sign of the kingdom which is not of this world.... Celibacy, then, is to be welcomed and continually renewed with a free and loving decision as a priceless gift from God."¹⁵

In a precise way, the text brings out some aspects that can significantly aid in the understanding and positive living out of celibacy: the sense of charism (precious gift given by God for the Church), the free option ("to be welcomed as a free and loving decision") and the love of communion and gift. These have always been considered essential aspects, but in the present social context they regain decisive significance.

Clearly, the text stresses that we should not be overly concerned about the adverse climate towards celibacy. No value of the Kingdom is easily recognized or accepted in the present culture. Then again, celibacy embraced by religious serves a completely different purpose than ecclesial celibacy. Ecclesial celibacy is a canonical norm imposed to provide the best quality of priestly service for the faithful. Whereas celibacy in religious life strives for a prophetic dimension: to radiate values to the human community and is a call to incarnate the challenge and the effort of a life of love. It can be said that the

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), 29.

call to celibacy, more than any project and personal effort, is really an election; that is, rather than our choosing celibacy, celibacy chooses us. We embrace it because we are attracted by the Spirit of Jesus to the point where we want to identify ourselves with his life. In this way celibacy is not, nor can it ever be, a social status, a form of life, or an ethical or aesthetic commitment. It is a gift of God, grace, given from the love of God, love without limits, and it is the vocation of love. Celibacy in the consecrated life is not, then, running from a hostile reality, is not volition or a human project; it is not simply a renouncement or continence; it is not comfort or a disdain of sexuality; it is not a practical motive of apostolic efficacy. It is a road to grace and love, that comes from Love and leads to Love. It is necessary, then, if we seek its deepest meaning, to cleanse or purify it from the unhealthy adherences that impoverish it and to root it once again in authentic gospel motives: Christ and his Kingdom.

From the perspective of charism, this same culture stimulates the living of celibacy as a vocation. To this call, a person must respond freely. Why not emphasize celibacy as a free election and the need always to live it in freedom? Accepted, desired and freely embraced, virginity can come to be for celibates a positive value, worthy of appreciation. Rondet assures that the present crisis of celibacy shows that many of those who leave it never really wanted it. Celibacy, for them, simply represented a required condition of priesthood or to enter a religious institute, whose ideals captivated them. They saw celibacy as a kind of contract, as a renouncement and as a difficulty which had to be assumed.¹⁶ If vocation does not constitute that which is to be realized in one's life, if it is not positively appreciated, if it is not the hidden "pearl," in moments of difficulty, everything easily unravels.

Finally, to understand sexuality, the present sexual context highlights its relation to love, although in practice, as we have denounced, divisions are frequently established. This relational sense of sexuality, communicative and loving, offers, as well, a horizon for understanding evangelical celibacy. Some have even proposed to change the classical terminology of the evangelical counsel (chastity, celibacy, virginity) and substitute the "vow for relationship" for it.¹⁷ What is behind this thinking is that the vow not only denotes bodily renunciation, sexuality, procreation or pleasure, but there is also a desire to express better the work of growth toward an authentic personality and a life open to relationship and love.

¹⁶ Cf. MICHEL RONDET - YVES RAGUIN, *El celibato evangélico en un mundo mixto*, Sal Térrea, Santander, 1980, 100-102.

¹⁷ DIARMUID O'MURCHU, *Rehacer la vida religiosa*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, 2001, 58-59.

This is not the time to debate such a proposal. But it is helpful to understand its essential affirmation: consecrated virginity is an act of love of Christ, a response to the seduction of his love, a love that is inseparable with loving our brothers and sisters. As such, living consecrated celibacy requires the inevitable work of integrating one's own affective life into the celibate life

To integrate the human experience of being sexual and the experience of grace and love of virginity continues to constitute the greatest challenge of the celibate life. The challenge is always present and is lived in a precise social context. It will be necessary to break with the tradition that has spurned the body, has feared and distrusted women, and has repressed sexuality. More precisely it will be to encourage a greater harmony with contemporary culture without ever dispensing from evangelical prophecy. It is necessary to search more for harmony, beauty, fullness, than renouncement, obligation and perfection. And we need to follow more closely cultural movements so as to perceive the density of human sexuality, not simply oriented toward procreation, but also toward communication, relationship, and love.

(THOMAS J. STEHLIK, C.M., translator)

Two Unpublished Documents of Saint Vincent de Paul

by Bernard Koch, C.M.

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Two new unpublished texts of Saint Vincent de Paul are presented here for the first time. They both deal with a single legal matter involving the coach lines of Rennes and Brittany. The Founder relied on these to help support his work, as well as the work of other orders and congregations, not the least of which were the Daughters of Charity. These texts are given as transcriptions in modern orthography, followed by a translation.

The first document is a preliminary statement by Marthe Goupil that she intends to withdraw from a lease she had entered into. She had purchased a right to income from her management of coaches owned by the Congregation of the Mission. In the second document, the widow Goupil, acting through her attorney, discharges Vincent de Paul, the owner of the coaches and carriages, from any responsibility for the fact that she did not receive the income she was entitled to from her investment. The parties agree that the lease is being legally canceled, and both agree not to charge the other for expenses involved and to hold each other harmless.

FIRST DOCUMENT

Withdrawal from a lease

Saturday, 14 May 1644

The original of this document is found in the Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, Paris. Previously, it had been in the Archives of the Congregation of the Province of Belgium, which deposited it in Paris in 1998.

Texts in *italic* are the restoration of abbreviations.¹ Texts left as **xxx** refer to words or letters that are not deciphered. Words or names between question marks, *? ?*, are doubtful renderings.

Transcription

Sheet 1 recto

- 1 Par devant le notaire royal du Comté de
Beaumont *et* châtellenie de Creil, résidant à Précy,² soussigné,
fut présente Marthe Goupil, veuve de feu Ghislain
Frappiet, vivant l'un des quatre messagers ordinaires
- 5 de Poitiers à Paris, de présent receveuse de la terre et
et seigneurie de Précy, y demeurant, laquelle a constitué
son procureur général et spécial René de Matsé,
écuyer, sieur du Plessis,³ *avocat* au Conseil Privé du
Roi, auquel elle a donné et donne pouvoir par ces
- 10 présentes, de pour elle et en son nom, passer par
devant tous notaires qu'il appartiendra le désistement
du bail par elle fait sous le nom du sieur Vezon,
de la ferme des Coches et Carrosses de la Ville de Rennes
et autres villes de Bretagne, qu'elle avait pris des
- 15 Pères de la Mission établis à *Saint Lazare* au faubourg
Saint Denis à Paris, ledit bail passé par devant Paizant⁴

¹ CLAUDE-JOSEPH DE FERRIÈRE, *La science parfaite des notaires*, Paris, 1733, Tome I, beginning page 607.

² Précy-sur-Oise, southwest of Creil (Oise), and Beaumont-sur-Oise (Val d'Oise), southwest of Précy.

³ Twenty-eight communes have this name in France, four of which are in the Oise. Hence it is impossible to be certain which one is meant.

⁴ Étienne Paisant, at work from 19 July 1611 to 3 July 1660 (Étude LXVI of the Minutier Central) was one of some 20-25 normal notaries used by the Congregation of the Mission. The fact that his name was written again at the beginning of the following line, "Paizant nott son," "nott" being the abbreviation of "nottaire," followed immediately by "son" which comes after Dupuys, and was struck through, shows that this is not the "minute" of the document, which always remained in the possession of the notary, but the

~~Payzant nott son~~ <struck through> notaire royal au Châtelet de Paris, et Dupuyc⁵ son compaignon, le XXVII^{me} jour de septembre MVI^{cent} quarante et ~~trois~~ deux <above trois>, et de ceci passer

- 20 pour ladite constituante tous actes qu'il avisera bon être. ~~Promettant etc.~~ <struck through> Promettant etc. obligeant etc.

Fait et passé au château dudit Précy le XIII^{me} jour de may MVI^{cent} quarante et quatre, en présence de Jehan Randon, sieur de Compen,⁶ et Thomas Maris, approuvé d'eux, Marthe Goupil

- 25 Randon <paraph>⁷
R. Demasé⁸ <paraph> Paisant <paraph>

- 28 Cremasson <paraph>

<Addition nine days later in another hand>

- 29 Paraphé par les partyes et nottaires soubzsignés, suivant <paraph of Demasé>

Sheet 2 verso

- 1 certain acte ce jourd'huy passé par devant lesdits notaires soubzsignés. Fait ce vingt troisieme may MVI^{cent} quarante quatre
R. Demasé <paraph> Vincens Depaul <paraph>
5 D Cusset <paraph> C. Moufel⁹ ?(or Moutel)? <paraph>

"grosse," a copy made for one of the parties. Here the copyist skipped a line but noticed it immediately. The official paraphs after the names assure the authenticity of the "grosse" copy.

⁵ This is Jean Dupuys, written here Dupuyc, employed from 24 September 1616 to 3 September 1648 (Étude XXXIV of the Minutier Central). He was one of the notaries for the Foundation Contract of the Congregation of the Mission (CCD 13, doc. 59, p. 217), with Nicolas Le Boucher (from Étude LXXVIII).

⁶ Probably Compans, a village in Seine-et-Marne, an arrondissement of Meaux.

⁷ The use of a legal "paraph" or "flourish" (French: *paraphe*, *parafe*) after a signature was required to authenticate the signature in legal documents.

⁸ The "De" of this name had been separated from "Masé" by the notary. It was typical in that period for a person to join the "De" to their name in their signature, just as Vincent did.

⁹ Moufel or Montel, but probably Moufel, written Moufle in line 28 of sheet 614 of the document of 23 May below. This notary and Demasé have not yet been identified.

Translation

Sheet 1 recto

- 1 Before the royal notary¹⁰ of the county of
 Beaumont and the castellany of Creil, the undersigned resident
 of Précy,
 there comes Marthe Goupil, widow of the late Ghislain
 Frappiet, during his life one of the four messengers¹¹ between
 5 Poitiers and Paris, presently receiving income from the land and
 the seigniory
 of Précy, and living there. She has appointed
 as her general and special agent René de Matsé,
 esquire, sieur of Plessis, advocate in the Privy Council of the
 King.¹² She has granted him and hereby grants authority
 10 for her and in her name to handle, in the presence of
 all the notaries to whom the matter pertains, the withdrawal
 from the lease which she entered into in the name of sieur
 Vezon,
 of the farm¹³ of the Coaches and Carriages of the City of Rennes
 and other towns of Brittany, which she took on
 15 the Fathers of the Mission established at Saint Lazare in the
 faubourg
 of Saint Denis in Paris; the lease had passed before Paizant
 royal notary of the Châtelet of Paris,
 and Dupuyc his associate, on the twenty-seventh day of
 September, 1642, and from him to the
 20 said party all the documents that he would advise
 to be proper. Promising, etc., obliging, etc.
 Done and agreed at the château of the said Précy, the fourteenth
 day of May, 1644, in the presence of Jehan
 Randon, sieur of Compen, and Thomas Maris, approved by
 them,
 25 Marthe Goupil

¹⁰ A royal notary was named by the king and had jurisdiction over a determined territory, even if a person who should present himself lived elsewhere. A seigniorial notary had jurisdiction only over persons residing in the seigniory.

¹¹ "Messenger" here referred to the person in charge of transporting letters or packages from one city to another.

¹² The Privy Council, which the king rarely attended in person, managed matters of justice and administration, whereas the High Council and the Council of State managed the government.

¹³ Not an agricultural farm but a company responsible for providing leases.

- Randon <paraph>
 R. Demasé <paraph> Paisant <paraph>
 28 Cremasson <paraph>
 <Addition nine days later in another hand>
 29 Signed and paraphed by the undersigned parties and notaries:
 <paraph of Demasé>

Sheet 2 verso

- 1 a certain document today passed before
 the said undersigned notaries. Done this twenty-third day of
 May 1644.¹⁴
 R. Demasé <paraph> Vincens Depaul <paraph>
 5 D. Cusset <paraph> C. Moufel ?(or Moutel)? <paraph>

SECOND DOCUMENT**Transactions concerning withdrawal from the lease**

Monday, 23 May 1644

The original of this document is found in the Lee Kohns Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, which graciously allowed its publication in *Vincentiana*. It was transcribed by Fr. Bernard Koch, C.M., and reviewed by Philippe Moulis, historian of Boulogne-sur-Mer.

Transcription[sheet 1, recto]6^c XIIIDu XXIII^e May MVT^c XLIII(Pro?, ou Ser^{vice}) ?payé?

- 1 Furent présents en leurs personnes Messire Vincent de Paul,
 prêtre, supérieur général des prêtres de la Mission établie à Saint
 Lazare,
 propriétaires des coches et carrosses allant et venant de cette
 ville de Paris en la ville de Rennes et aux villes de la province
 5 de Bretagne, demeurant les sieurs De Paul audit Saint Lazare les
 Paris, d'une part, et René Demasé, écuyer sieur du Plessis,

¹⁴ Signed on the same day as the second document below.

- advocat au Conseil Privé du Roy, demeurant à Paris, rue
de l'Arbre secq, parroisse *Saint Germain de l'Auxerrois*, ou ¹⁵ nom
et comme
procureur de *honnorable* femme Marthe Goupil, veufve de feu
Gillain
- 10 Frappier, vivant l'un de quatre *messaigers ordinaires* de
Poitiers à
Paris, d'elle fondé de *procuracion* passée par devant Lemasson,
notaire royal au Conté de Beaumont et châtelleyenye de Creil,
résidant à Précy, le quatorzième du présent mois et an, spéciale
en substance, *<letter crossed out>* pour faire et passer au présents,
ainsy qu'il est apparu
- 15 aux *notaires* soubzsignez, par l'original d'icelles, étant en après ¹⁶
signé
Marthe Goupil, Randon Paris, R. Demasé et Lemasson,
qui est demeuré annexé à la présente minute *<sic>* après avoir
été paraphé
ne varietur par ledit *sieur Masé et dudit sieur* de Paul, et à
laquelle
Goupil icelluy *sieur Masé* promet faire ratifier au présents *<sic>*
et à l'entretènement ¹⁷
- 20 d'icelle, la faire obliger ¹⁸ et en fournir acte de ratification valable
audit *sieur de Paul ?en lestepre?* de Paris, toutes fois et quand il
en
sera requis, sans néanmoins *que* le défaut de ladite ratification
puisse faire préjudice à ces dits présents, ladite Goupil ayant
droit
par déclaration de Jean Vezon, qui aurait pris *<word crossed out>*
- 25 à ferme lesdits coches et carrosses par bail passé par devant
Dupuis
et Paysant, *notaires*, le vingt septième septembre MVI^c quarante
deux, ainsi
qu'il est porté en l'acte de ladite déclaration passée par devant
Le Vasseur
et ~~ledit~~ *<scratched or blotted>* Moufle, lesdits *notaires*
soubzsignez, le dernier décembre
audit an MVI^c quarante deux. D'autre part lesquelles

¹⁵ = au.

¹⁶ The reading is uncertain, possibly *en propre*.

¹⁷ The reading is uncertain.

¹⁸ "Oblige" is a technical legal term used in contracts. It means not only a natural moral obligation, but an obligation entered into in law, passed by notaries, for a loan of money or something else. It differs from simple promises made with ordinary signatures. An "obligation" must contain the reason why it is entered into.

- 30 parties, pour éviter aux différends *qui* étaient prêts
à nestre¹⁹ entre eulx, parce *que* ladite Goupil prétendait
ledit Père de Paul devoir être tenu de la dédommager
des non jouissances par elle souffertes en ladite ferme à cause
des
- 34 empêchements formés à ladite jouissance par les ~~fermiers~~ <struck
through, blotted>

[sheet 1 verso]

[6^c XIII verso]

- 1 messagers de ladite Province jusque à ce jour, ou
à faire cesser iceux empêchements pour l'avenir.
À quoi ledit Père²⁰ de Paul maintenait n'être obligé,
attendu que ladite Goupil étant tenue, suivant ledit bail,
- 5 à faire l'établissement desdits coches et carrosses à ses frais
et dépens, et ?lor? s'il y avait quelque empêchement, elle
devait se pourvoir contre ceux qui avaient formé lesdits
empêchements et continuer les poursuites ?encommencés?²¹ à ce
sujet,
- comme aussi pour éviter à tous frais et dépens
- 10 qu'il conviendrait faire à cause desdits différends. Ont
convenu et accordé entre eulx ce *qui* ensuit, c'est assavoir
que lesdits Pierre de Paul et sieur Masé, audit nom, se sont
volontairement désistés et départis, se désistent et départent
par cesdites présentes, dudit bail ?casent²² ou casau? et accordent
qu'il demeure
- 15 nul et résolu²³ pour le temps *qui* en reste audit jour du jourd'huy
en avant. Ce faisant, ladite Goupil, déchargée tant pour
le passé que pour l'advenir des loyers et fermaiges
* et carrosses desdits coches *, sans *que* en après ledit Pierre <sic>
de Paul lui en
<paraphs> puisse faire aucune demande en quelque sorte et
manière
- 20 que ce soit, ains²⁴ icelluy Pierre de Paul l'en décharge
purement et absolument, sans autre dépens, dommages
et intérêts de part et d'autre. Au moyen de quoy
ledit Pierre de Paul consent et accorde, outre ce que
dessus, que ladite Goupil se pourvoie et continue ses poursuites

¹⁹ An old spelling for naître.²⁰ Incorrectly written throughout as "Pierre."²¹ Doubtful reading, because the word *encommencé* is not known. It seems the only possible reading and may be a word used only by the scribe.²² "Casent," that is, "cassent" (to break the lease).²³ Meaning *dissous*, dissolved.²⁴ = *mais*.

- 25 si bon lui semble à lencontre desdits messagers et autres
 qui auraient formé lesdits empêchements, pour avoir ses
 dommagemens²⁵ à cause desdites non jouissances jusque à ce
 jourd'huy, sans néanmoins
 que, pour raison de ce, ledit Père de Paul puisse être tenu
 d'aucune garantie desdits dédommages, ni même que faulte
 d'icelluy
- 30 et desdits fautifs ladite Goupil puisse avoir aucun recours contre

[sheet 2 recto]

6^c XV

- 1 icellui Pierre de Paul ni rejeter contre lui aucuns
 frais et dépens, ains ?l'en garde? et indemnise de tous ceux
 qui pourraient être prétendus par lesdits messagers.
 Toutesfois a été convenu entre les parties qu'en cas que
- 5 la poursuite du procès intenté contre lesdits messagers
 pour lesdites non jouissances ?dont monsieur de Mouchal?²⁶
 est à présent rapporteur, ledit sieur de Paul fasse
 garde d'y trouver quelques frais et dépens. Il rejettera
 iceux ?parsietrans?²⁷ sur ceulx qui pourront être
- 10 adjugés. Et pour l'exécution des présentes et ?cy pendants?,
 lesdites parties ont élu et élisent leur domicile irrévocable en
 ladite
 ville en Paris, savoir, ledit sieur de Paul audit Saint Lazare, et
 ledit
 C. de Masé, audit nom, en la maison où il est demeurant,
 devant déclarée, ausquelz lieux ?nousxxx? Promettant etc.
- 15 obligeant etc. chacun en droit, soi et ?xxx? Fait et passé, savoir
 pour ledit [~~xxx en la~~] <struck through, blotted> sieur de Paul
 audit Saint Lazare, et ledit
 sieur de Masé, audit nom, en la maison ?xxx? de ?xxx? secrétaire
 du Roi, size rue de Montmartre, l'an M 6^c quarante
 quatre, le vingt-troisième jour de Mai après midi
- 20 Ont signé, notifié, les présentes
- Vincens Depaul <paraph>
- R. Demasé
- Moufel ?(or Moutel)?²⁶
- 24 D. ? ?Cusset or Busset?

²⁵ For *dédommagements*.

²⁶ Probably the same Moufel as above. The scribes wrote as they heard the name or as they could while reading from the minute that they were copying. The handwriting was often barely legible since it was done hastily.

²⁷ The end of the document is filled with nearly illegible terms. This may be a form of *poursuite*, and it may be two words written together, a common occurrence in manuscripts of the period.

Transcription

[sheet 1, recto]

6^c XIII

The twenty-third of May 1644

Paid

- 1 Present in person were Messire Vincent de Paul,
 priest, superior general of the priests of the Mission established
 at Saint Lazare,
 owners of the coaches and carriages going and coming between
 this
 city of Paris into the city of Rennes and the towns of the
 province
- 5 of Brittany, with sieur De Paul living at the said Saint Lazare les
 Paris, on the one hand; and René Demasé, esquire, sieur of
 Plessis,
 advocate at the Privy Council of the King, residing in Paris on
 rue
 de l'Arbre secq,²⁸ parish of Saint Germain de l'Auxerrois, in the
 name of,
 and agent of, the honorable woman Marthe Goupil, widow of the
 late Gillain
- 10 Frappier, in his life one of the four ordinary messengers between
 Poitiers and Paris,
 established by her as her proxy, passed before Lemasson,
 royal notary of the County of Beaumont and the castellany of
 Creil,
 residing at Précy, on the fourteenth of the current month and
 year, and her special agent in substance,
 to have the proxy passed before the present notaries, as it has
 appeared
- 15 to the undersigned notaries, by an original of the texts later
 signed
 Marthe Goupil, Randon Paris, R. Demasé and Lemasson,
 which was joined to the present minute after being signed with
 paraps
*ne varietur*²⁹ by the said sieur Masé and the said sieur de Paul;
 and to the same Goupil
 the aforementioned sieur Masé promises to have ratified before
 the present [notaries] and for her
- 20 certainty to oblige her to provide the valid act of ratification to

²⁸ Between the Place Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois and the rue Saint-Honoré, 75001, Paris.

²⁹ "Lest it be changed," that is, by anyone else.

- the said sieur de Paul **?en lestepre?** in Paris, as many times and
 whenever it will be requested,
 without, however, allowing the default of the said ratification
 to be able to harm the said parties present, since the said Goupil
 has
 the right, by the declaration of Jean Vezon, who is supposed to
 have taken
 25 by lease on the farm the said coaches and carriages, passed
 before
 Dupuis, and Paysant, notaries, the twenty-seventh of September
 1642, as recorded in the document of the said declaration passed
 before Le Vasseur and Moufle, the undersigned notaries, on the
 last
 day of December, in the year 1642. Then, these
 30 parties, to avoid the differences that were ready to
 arise between them, since the said Goupil held
 that the said Père de Paul should be obliged to recompense
 the lack of income suffered from the said farm because of the
 34 obstacles placed to the said income by the

[sheet 1 verso]

[6^c XIII verso]

- 1 messengers of the said Province up to today, or
 to cause these obstacles to cease in the future.
 To this charge, the said Père de Paul maintained that he was not
 obliged,
 since the said Goupil was responsible, according to the said lease,
 5 to establish the said coaches and carriages at her cost
 and expense, and then, if there were any obstacle, she
 was supposed to act against those who had placed the said
 obstacles and to continue to pursue the matter already begun,
 likewise to avoid all costs and expense
 10 that might arise because of the said differences. They have
 agreed between them on the following: that is,
 that the said Pierre [*sic*] de Paul and sieur Masé, in her name,
 have
 voluntarily desisted and annulled, and do desist and annul
 by these documents, the broken (?) lease, and they agree that it
 remains
 15 null and void for the remaining time from today
 onward. In doing this, the said Goupil is freed both for the
 past and for the future from the rentals and income
 of the said coaches [*^* and carriages <*paraphs*>], so that
 afterwards,
 the said Pierre [*sic*] de Paul can make no demand on her in any
 way or manner

- 20 but Pierre [*sic*] de Paul frees her from them
 purely and absolutely, without other expense, damages
 and interests on one side or the other. By means of this
 the said Pierre [*sic*] de Paul consents and agrees, in addition to
 what is found
 above, that the said Goupil may see to and continue her pursuit,
 25 if it seems good to her, to deal with the said messengers and
 others
 who are supposed to have placed the said obstacles,
 to get indemnification because of the said lack of income up to
 today, without,
 nevertheless, for that reason, the said Père de Paul being able to
 be obliged
 to any guarantee for the said indemnification, nor even, should
 this not be forthcoming
 30 the said Goupil should have no recourse for the said faults
 against

[sheet 2 recto]

6^c XV

- 1 Pierre [*sic*] de Paul nor bring up against him any
 costs or expense, but she should protect him from them and
 indemnify him against all those
 which might be claimed by the said messengers.
 However, it has been agreed between the parties that in case
 5 the pursuit of the matter against the said messengers
 for the said non-payments, of which Monsieur de Mouchal (?)
 is the rapporteur, the said sieur de Paul should take
 care not to find any charges or expense. He will reject
 the legal pursuits against those who might be judged.
 10 And for the execution of these present and pending documents,
 the said parties have chosen and do choose their irrevocable
 domicile in the said city of Paris,
 that is, the said sieur de Paul at the said Saint Lazare,
 and the said C. de Masé, in her name, in the house where he
 lives stated above, in which places we (?) Promising, etc.
 15 obliging, etc. each in law, (?) Concluded and passed, that is
 for the said sieur de Paul at the said Saint Lazare, and the said
 sieur de Masé, in her name, in the house of (?), secretary
 of the king, located on rue de Montmartre, in the year 1644,
 the twenty-third day of May in the afternoon.
 20 The following have signed and attested to the present documents

Vincens Depaul <paraph>

R. Demasé

Moufel ?(or Moutel)?²⁶

- 24 D. ? ?Cusset or Busset?

* * * * *

Conclusion

Like several others, these documents help us understand one of the elements of the intense activity of Monsieur Vincent in material or financial matters. In these he was able to find the resources of all sorts to help the poor and the provinces ruined by wars. These were not only gifts but also agricultural establishments and investments in several coach companies, such as Rennes, Rouen, Soissons, etc. As is seen here, these often entailed delicate problems.

These documents also help us understand his personality somewhat better. He was tough in business matters, having been trained in knowledge of legal procedures from his youth, since he had a maternal uncle who was a royal attorney at the presidial court of Dax. He was at one and the same time both hard and accommodating, and opposed to lawsuits. Also, he always knew how to be accommodating and to resolve matters amicably. We have several other documents that show the same trait.

VINCENTIAN

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